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SCRIPTURE RECORD

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

THE BLESSED VIRGIN,

THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD.

“Blessed is she that believed.”—ST. LUKE i. 45.

OXFORD,
AND 377, STRAND, LONDON:
JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCC LVI.



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INTRODUCTION.

UPWARDS of twelve centuries ago the Koran was given to the world by the Arabian impostor Mahomet, “professedly as the completion of the former Scriptures of the Law and the Gospel; as a further revelation, that is to say, perfective of both; and advancing, in its turn, on the revelation of the Gospel, as this had previously advanced on that of the Mosaic law, uniting itself with the Old and New Testaments, under the authoritative titles of ‘The Law and the Gospel, and the other Scriptures;’ and representing these three volumes as together constituting the one true manual of the faithful, and the sum of all extant written revelation^a.” One of the dogmas of these “other Scriptures,” which Mahomet was given the sword to enforce upon the belief and consciences of men, was the dogma of the Blessed Virgin’s exemption from original sin; for the Koran declares that, of the whole human race, two persons only, Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, were exempt from the touch of Satan, or stain of original sin—the black drop which the Mahometan creed affirms is to be found in the centre of every other human heart^b. It is quite evident that the doctrine of the Blessed

^a See Forster’s “Mahometanism Unveiled,” vol. ii. pp. 10 and 15.

^b *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 393.

Virgin's exemption from original sin was adopted by Mahomet from the prevailing heresies of the day, but it is not easy to understand his reason for incorporating it in those "other Scriptures" which he gave to the world; unless, indeed, he thought that by placing the Blessed Mother on an equality with her Son, his followers would be constrained either to worship them both as God, (a heresy which he loudly denounced,) or to deny the Deity of the one as well as of the other,—an alternative which they adopted; this remarkable dogma having been always held by the Moslem in conjunction with their own antitrinitarian doctrine, which recognises neither the Son nor the Spirit in the unity of the Godhead. This doctrine respecting the Blessed Virgin's exemption from original sin, held so many centuries ago as an article of faith by the Mahometan, has only just been authoritatively given to the members of the Church of Rome by the infallible guide and Bishop of their souls, not as a new revelation, or as a recent development, but as an apostolic truth, always considered by the faithful to be among those "unwritten verities" which, added to the Law and the Gospel, have been to the Romanist what "the other Scriptures" have been to the Mahometan.

St. John, in his Gospel, speaks to us of these unwritten verities of God as being so manifold, so innumerable, that had they been written, "the world itself could not have contained the books which should have been written;" and the apostle, by thus bringing before our minds the vastness of the work of our redemption, "and the unsearchable riches of Christ,"

makes us feel the wisdom and goodness of Him who in tender consideration for our "little life, which is but as a vapour," and our limited capacity, which can see but in part, and know but in part, took out of a fulness which would have overwhelmed us, those things alone which were needed to purify our hearts, and "to make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." For the things which have been written are emphatically declared to have been written for this one comprehensive purpose, that "we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in believing we might have life through His Name." Before, however, these blessed things were written for our learning, they were preached orally to the people; first by the Great Author and *Finisher* of our faith, and then by His apostles; and it is recorded in the Acts, that when the Bereans listened to "the words of this life" from the lips of the Apostle Paul, being more noble—that is, of a more candid and generous spirit—than those of Thessalonica, they at once perceived the intrinsic excellence, the elevation of sentiment, and the divine purity of the apostolic teaching; but having the oracles of God to which they could refer, they would not trust entirely to their own feelings on so momentous a subject: they said, like the Pharisees, though in a very different spirit, "We know that God hath spoken to us by the prophets;" and they knew also, that if the doctrine preached by the apostles was really what it declared itself to be,—a further revelation of the same Almighty will,—it would be strictly in accordance with what had been given to them in the Law and

the Prophets; and with that clearness of vision which the eye that is single ever gives to the true and honest heart, they immediately saw what it was their duty to do, and they did it; they searched the Scriptures daily, and they found that what to them were as yet the unwritten verities of the Gospel, instead of contradicting, elucidated, instead of abolishing, fulfilled, the written verities of the revealed Word of God. Let us "go and do likewise," divesting ourselves of prejudice, "with all readiness of mind" to receive the truth; let us carefully examine all that Holy Scripture has told us respecting the Blessed Virgin, the mother of our Lord; let us see whether this old dogma, newly declared to be an article of the true Christian faith by the Church of Rome, can in any way be made to harmonize, not with *isolated* passages, but with the *general* teaching of God's Holy Word; let us test the truth of this unwritten verity by the things which have been written; for of this we may rest assured—that, supposing it possible for man to comprehend all those things which the world itself could not have contained, and thus to measure as it were the waters of the ocean "in the hollow of his hand," not one of those unwritten verities would be found to make void or contradict "one jot or tittle" of that Word written under the guidance of the Spirit, and which is all-sufficient to lead us in the way of truth, and "to make us wise unto salvation."

CHAPTER I.

THE ANNUNCIATION.

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.—LUKE i. 38.

THE first promise needed, and therefore the first promise ever given to fallen man, was the promise of restoration. In wrath God remembered mercy, and in tender compassion for the wretched culprits who were to be driven forth upon a barren and desolate world, He gave them as an anchor to their souls the hope of regaining a paradise brighter and more beautiful than the one from which they were then to be expelled; a paradise in which the sun, all glorious as he was, should be no longer "their light by day, neither the moon their light by night, for the Lord should be unto them an everlasting light, and their God their glory." Woman, who had brought sin and death into the world, was to be the instrument of bringing to it life and restoration; "the seed of the woman," by the wonder-working power of the Most High, was to become the first-fruits of a new and spiritual creation; for "as in Adam all died," even "so in Christ were all to be made alive." The eternal Son of God, by taking our nature, became the first-born of the spiritual

2 SCRIPTURE RECORD OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

creation of God, for the first Adam was "of the earth, earthy," the second Adam was "*the Lord from heaven*;" and so what seemed impossible to the patriarch Job, impossible to man, was possible to God. The clean thing was brought out of the unclean, and God in *man* reconciled the world to Himself, "purifying to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." The advent of the Word *made* flesh for us, the coming of this "the seed of the woman," is the grand theme of all prophecy. Every circumstance respecting this precious seed is minutely recorded. In speaking of Him in His divine nature, as "the Lord from heaven," language is exhausted to describe His glorious attributes, His divine perfections; for He was to be "called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." In speaking of Him in His humiliation, as "*Emmanuel, God with us*," (for so He was called by the prophet,) the voice of the holy men of old fall suddenly as from heaven to earth, and take up the lowliest strain to describe the coming down of the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity. In deep awe and amazement at the great mystery of godliness, they beheld "*the Man*," the Holy One born of a virgin, the seed of the woman, "made sin for us;" they beheld the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, from whom we hid our face, not as the seraphim, in adoring awe and reverential fear, but in cruel hatred and in bitter scorn; they beheld the Man despised

and rejected by those He came to save: and when they thought of how this marvellous revelation of God's love to man would reveal, as nothing else could have revealed, the fierce enmity of the carnal mind to God, they tremblingly asked, in anticipation of the sufferings which would follow, "Who shall abide His coming?" Continually do the prophets dwell upon this wonderful theme, the advent of the Lord of Heaven; more and more clearly do they express themselves, as the time drew near when He was to bow the heavens and to come down, and tread the path of sorrows upon this our earth, which sin had made so dark, under His sacred feet. Every thing concerning the Saviour's advent is minutely mentioned in prophecy: Abraham, His father after the flesh; Sarah, His honoured ancestress; Bethlehem, His birthplace; Jesse, the stem out of which this divine branch was to spring; David, the royal lineage which was to claim Him; the name to be given to His messenger, the price at which He was valued, the companions of His agony, the manner of His death, the very words He was to utter, the tomb of the rich that was to receive Him, — all is minutely declared in prophecy, nothing respecting Him is omitted but the name of her who was to give Him birth. When we consider the great importance attached to names in Holy Writ, when we remember that upon giving the promise of the Saviour to Abraham, the Almighty thought fit to mark that memorable occasion by giving new names—may we

4 SCRIPTURE RECORD OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

not call them *Christian* names?—both to the patriarch and to Sarah, and in pronouncing a blessing upon Sarah, to honour her so greatly as to declare that *she* should be a “mother of nations,” and that “kings should be born of *her*,” it is surely remarkable that nowhere is the name of the blessed mother of our Lord once to be found in prophecy. “The seed of the *woman*,” born of “a virgin,” are the general terms used to denote the *manner* of the Saviour’s birth, not the blessed individual who was to bear Him. Scripture, it is remarkable, when speaking of the advent of the Lord, ever refers to Sarah, not to Mary. Those who are seeking the Lord are commanded to “look to Abraham their father, and to Sarah that bare them;” and not only is this the case in the Old Testament, but so is it in the New. For as the prophets never by anticipation point to the individual instrument chosen by God to be the mother of His Christ, so neither by evangelist or apostle is she ever referred to individually in connection with the coming of our Lord. St. Paul, alluding to that glorious event, looks back to Abraham and to Sarah. Speaking of Abraham, he tells us that Abraham had two sons—one by the bondwoman, and the other by the freewoman; that “Agar the bondwoman answered to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children,” but that Sarah the freewoman represented “the Jerusalem which is above, which is the mother of us all.” And even when speaking of the actual birth

of our Lord, the apostle uses the same general expression, speaks in the same general terms; he never mentions the name of the blessed Virgin, but says, "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a *woman*, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

When the apostle looked back upon the advent of our Lord, he appeared to be entirely engrossed with the gracious manner in which God had fulfilled His promises to His people; when, "seeing there was no man, and wondering there was no intercessor," He had Himself become their Saviour, working out their deliverance by His Almighty power alone, for "of the people there was none with Him," no, not one to drink of His bitter cup, or to share in the great work of man's redemption. In the travail of His soul, He alone knew His own bitterness, and when satisfied with its victorious result, none might presume to intermeddle with His joy. When the prophets spoke of the advent of our Lord, they thought only of the blessing which His coming would bring to the whole world, and so we find Isaiah exultingly exclaiming, "Unto *us* a child is born, unto *us* a Son is given," as if by anticipation he had beheld the outstretched hand of this mighty Deliverer, pronouncing a blessing upon all His creatures, declaring the universality of the tie which bound Him as to a brother, a sister, and a mother, to *all* who heard God's Word and kept it.

6 SCRIPTURE RECORD OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

The first mention of the Blessed Virgin by *name* is found in the Evangelists. In the first chapter of St. Luke we are simply told that the angel Gabriel "was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's *name was Mary.*" Very beautiful, and full of reverence, is the salutation of the angel Gabriel: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, for the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." The birth of the Saviour is then announced. To Mary the angel declares that He who is to be born of her is not only to be called Jesus, but also the Son of the Highest, as if to draw her mind upwards from herself to the God whose handmaid she was. To Joseph, also, He is announced in His divine as well as in His human nature. In His divine nature, as "Emanuel, God with us," He was come "to save His people from their sins," as the universal Saviour; announced as such to Joseph as well as to "Mary, his espoused wife." In profound humility and ready faith the Virgin receives this mysterious announcement. To become the mother of the long-promised Messiah was the ardent desire and prayer of *every* Hebrew woman, shewing that no exemption from the ordinary condition of humanity was considered indispensable to the reception of this great and distinguished privilege. Full, then, of wondrous joy and exultation, the Virgin hastens to the hill-country to visit her cousin Elisabeth, who

had been, like herself, the subject of miraculous interposition, and to whom, therefore, she might unburden her mind, and speak of the marvellous communication made to her by the angel without fear of meeting with that heartless indifference, that cold incredulity and suspicion, so painful to a true and honest heart—to whom all deception, and especially deception in what concerns our spiritual interests, is as unnatural as it is abhorrent. It was not, however, necessary for Mary to disclose to her cousin the purpose of her visit, for Elisabeth, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, recognises her at once as the mother of her Lord, humbly declares her own unworthiness to receive so honoured a guest, pronounces a blessing upon the Virgin's ready faith, and prophetically declares that as she had believed, so should there be a performance of those things which had been told her of the Lord. When the beloved apostle fell down at the feet of the apocalyptic angel, and was reproved in the words, "See thou do it not,—worship God;" when Cornelius, newly called into the Church of God, fell at the feet of St. Peter, and was peremptorily desired by that true apostle "to stand up, for that he also was a man," it seems to us as if the greatness of the occasion, the overwhelming feelings of the moment, might in both these instances have excused this approach to idolatry of the creature: how much more should we have been disposed to excuse Elisabeth, had she fallen at the feet of the

honoured guest she felt herself unworthy even to receive under her roof! That she “did it not” must be attributed to the constraining power of that Holy Spirit which directed the words in answer to the salutation of Mary,—words full of truth and soberness, entirely removed from even the slightest approach to adoration. The Virgin’s hymn of praise we all know by heart: happily for us, it has been embodied in the evening service of the Church; our Reformers retained it, and wisely did they do so, for there it stands, in itself a refutation of all the vain and foolish imaginations of man. This beautiful song is very similar to that of Hannah, the mother of Samuel. In it the Blessed Virgin magnifies the Lord; in it her spirit rejoices in God her Saviour; in it she declares herself to be favoured not from any inherent holiness in herself, but because He had regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden; in it she declares by the Holy Spirit that all generations should call her Blessed. “Blessed” is the title she accepts for herself, for it had been given to her by Him whose name is Holy; and not only in her own generation was she to be called Blessed, but so is she to be called “by all generations;” this, and this only, is to be her title. Wherever the Scriptures are read, in all tongues and in all lands, Blessed she must be called; for as we dare not add to, so neither must we take away from, the written Word of God. Little does the Virgin speak of herself in this truly catholic hymn of praise, but rather does she love to

dwell upon God's mercy to them that fear Him,— His power “in scattering the proud in the imaginations of their hearts;” His compassion in filling the hungry with the blessings of goodness; His justice in sending the rich (those who need not, and therefore ask not,) empty away; and above all, she loves to celebrate the faithfulness of Him with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning, considering herself but as one of God's instruments, the last chosen by Him in the mighty chain of events which was to bring salvation to the world. She, as a true daughter of Abraham, delights to look back to the father of the faithful, and to glorify God that “He, remembering His mercy, hath holpen His servant Israel,” by fulfilling the gracious promise which He gave “to Abraham and to his seed for ever.”

CHAPTER II.

ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS.

And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.—ST. LUKE ii. 16.

THE advent of the Lord Jesus Christ was the one great event for which prophecy for four thousand years had been gradually preparing the people of God. It was an answer to the prayer of Moses,—“ Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, to lead them out and to bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd^a ;” it fulfilled the earnest petition of the Psalmist,—“ O Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth^b ;” it fulfilled the passionate desire of the patriarch, that there were a days-man between the creature and the Creator, to “ lay his hand upon both, and to plead for him with his God ;” it was an answer to the prophetic interrogation of Solomon,—“ Will God indeed dwell on the earth^c ?” It was an answer to the cry of the sick for a physician ; of the afflicted for a

^a Numb. xxvii. 16, 17.

^b Ps. xxx. 1.

^c 1 Kings viii. 27.

Comforter ; of the sinner for a Saviour. It fulfilled the desire of all nations, and the ardent longing of the human soul that it might again be permitted to see God and live ; it realized the dream of the heathen, that the gods would come down in the likeness of men. When the Saviour came into the world, the Almighty Himself proclaimed the Deity of the new-born Monarch, and the eternity of the kingdom He had been sent to establish ; “for unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever : a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom.” And as God, heaven, and earth were called upon by the same Almighty voice to do Him homage, “Let all the angels of God worship Him” was heard by the blessed spirits in the highest heavens, and they bent in as lowly adoration before the manger of Bethlehem as they did before the throne of the Omnipotent. “Worship Him, all ye gods,” was heard even by the senseless deities of the heathen. Dagon once more fell prostrate before the true ark of the world’s salvation ; Moloch trembled on his lofty throne, for his reign would soon be over ; no longer would he be permitted to receive and crush in his fiery arms the offering of the wretched mother bereft by a cruel fanaticism of all pity for the son of her bosom, for he too must give place to the Holy One, who in His own good time would “take the heathen for His inheritance,” and who, in wonderful and blessed contrast, would bid the tender infants to His loving embrace, en-

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circle them with the arms of His mercy, and send them forth with the Triune blessing upon them, all-powerful to enable them, if true to themselves, to overcome the world. The Jewish high-priest was struck dumb at the coming of this his great anti-type, and so were the oracles in all the world; for the law had received its fulfilment, and the Word made flesh was henceforth to be the only oracle permitted to man. The shadows of the night were to flee away when the Sun of Righteousness had arisen upon the earth, which trembled and was still at His presence. Man alone, for whom He came, trembled not; His own chosen people, to whom He came, heeded Him not: self-occupied, and immersed in the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the love of other things, they remained blind, careless, indifferent to the advent of their great Messiah. And yet there had been signs and wonders enough, one might have thought, to have startled them out of their spiritual slumber, — for they must have heard of the wonderful announcement by the angel Gabriel to one of the house and lineage of David. Why then did they not look up, and know that their redemption was at hand? The vision of Zechariah was so publicly proclaimed, taking place as it did in the temple on one of the greatest festivals of the Church, that all in Jerusalem must have known that the blessing had departed from the priesthood of Levi. Why then did not the Jew of himself understand that the great High-priest, the

true Melchisedec, was come to bless them effectually, by turning every one of them from their iniquities? How was it that when He, the Messiah they professed to believe in, to look forward to, did really come, they were so totally unprepared to receive Him as to have nothing to offer Him but a manger, a cross, and a sepulchre? Such marvellous blindness would seem to us incredible, had we not now in every British Jew we look upon a far more terrible spectacle of obduracy and unbelief; for if their forefathers were condemned for rejecting Moses and the prophets, what must be the condemnation of the Jew now, who not only rejects Moses and the prophets, as his fathers did, but also rejects that terrible witness for the truth which he has in *himself*, in his own banished, miserable condition, without "priest, prophet, or king," his temple a ruin, his nation trodden under foot, his people scattered as the autumnal leaves to the four winds under heaven? For not only does he refuse to see in these righteous judgments the chastisements of God upon his own sin of unbelief, as well as upon that of his forefathers, but he also refuses to see in the alleviations afforded to his people in their long night of affliction the mercy of Him, their long-rejected Messiah. For by whom have the Jews been trampled upon and persecuted? Has it not been by those who, like themselves, have had zeal without knowledge, which makes men cruel,—and faith without charity, which profits them nothing? And with whom, on the con-

trary, has the Jew found a shelter from the storm, and a refuge from the fury of the oppressor? Has it not been with those who bear the Cross of the Nazarene upon their hearts, and shew forth His divine precepts in their lives? Surely the loving-kindnesses of Christian people to their Jewish brethren for the sake of that worthy Name, which they are taught to blaspheme, ought to be as coals of fire on their head, to melt them into tenderness and love towards Him who waits only the penitential sigh to reveal Himself to His ancient people in all His long-suffering mercy; for though "fools and slow of heart^d," as they have ever been, "to believe all that the prophets have spoken," yet when no longer determined to resist the truth, but rather desiring "an interpreter, one among a thousand^e," to solve their doubts and to open their understandings, He will draw near to them, as He did to their brethren at Emmaus, to rend the veil, not from the future, but from the past^f, to shew them, not His glory, but His truth, by "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, and expounding to them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself." Thus will He restore again His people Israel, not by converting them to a new faith, or to another God, but by bringing them back to the Triune Jehovah, the God in whom their fathers trusted, "the Hope of Israel, and the Saviour

^d St. Luke xxiv. 25.

^e Job xxxiii. 23.

^f "But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away."—2 Cor. iii. 16.

thereof;" the God not only of the Gentile, but also of the Jew; the God of whom both Jew and Gentile may say, in the words of Isaiah, "As for our Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts is His name^g." When baptized into this great name, God's ancient people will need no second Pentecostal effusion to enable them at once to speak, in every tongue under heaven, the wonderful works of God; when "grafted again into their own olive-tree^h," "they will be enabled to bring forth abundantly the fruits of righteousness, and to fill the earth with "the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seaⁱ." Beautiful upon the mountains will then be their feet, when "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;" when, with a zeal enlightened by knowledge, and guided by love, they "compass heaven and earth to make one proselyte" to the faith of the Crucified; everywhere bringing "life from the dead^k," by carrying the glad tidings of His salvation "into all lands, and His words into the ends of the world^l."

It is more cheering to look forward to these "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," than to return to Judæa, and contemplate its position at the birth of the Saviour. It was not at all at *a convenient season* that the Messiah visited His people, for just at that moment they

^g Isa. xlvii. 4; St. Luke xxiv. 27.

^h "For if thou wert cut out of the olive-tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive-tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive-tree?"—Rom. xi. 24.

ⁱ Isa. xi. 9.

^k Rom. xi. 15.

^l Ps. xix. 4.

were peculiarly pre-occupied: numbers were going to and fro; the Holy City was thronged with travellers, in consequence of "a decree" which had gone forth from Rome from Cæsar Augustus. History tells us little about this decree, except that fortunately it imposed no burden on the conscience, nor did it claim any surrender of that perfect liberty which the Jews enjoyed under *heathen* Rome, of worshipping God after the manner of their fathers. This decree only demanded some portion of their worldly substance; and as the true people of God, whether Jew or Christian, were ever most conscientious about paying the burdens imposed upon them even by a *heathen* state, whose laws offered them protection, we find that it was in obedience to that command that our Lord's parents had left Nazareth, and that Joseph had gone up to their native city of Bethlehem, *to be taxed* with Mary, his espoused wife; and before they could return to their lowly home at Nazareth, the Saviour was born. But "there was no room for Him in the inn," in the very city of that David who in the fervent piety of his heart "sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob," saying, "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids; I will not suffer the temples of my head to take any rest, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." In that very city there was

no room for Him who was "born King of the Jews." "He came unto His own, but His own received Him not." The stone which the builders were to reject was cast out as it were by anticipation, and some lowly shed, some poor receptacle for the cattle of the field, was all that could be found to shelter the sacred head of Him who came to establish a kingdom which can never be destroyed, and a dominion which can never pass away; but as His kingdom was not of this world, neither was it to receive glory from man, but from God. Whilst the governors of the earth were planning their schemes of conquest and aggrandisement; whilst the wisdom of the children of this world was intent upon counteracting or forwarding these schemes, as if they held the future in their feeble grasp, and the Providence of God within their control; whilst all these, the great and powerful, were left to their hopes, their fears, their vain imaginations and still vainer anticipations, the heavens were opened to the enraptured gaze of some simple shepherds, who were keeping their watch on the mountains of Galilee, faithfully tending their master's flock, for "it was night,"—a season of danger, when the eye of the true shepherd must never sleep, nor his eyelid slumber, lest the thief should come upon him unawares, and his poor sheep should be taken from the fold, and his little lambs rudely plucked from the shelter of his bosom,—to these true shepherds an angel of the Lord appears, bearing to them the wonderful tidings that

in the city of David unto them is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. No mention whatever is made by the angel of the blessed mother of this wondrous babe,—for it is to *them* this “child is born,” to *them* this “Son is given,” that they, like her, may magnify the Lord and rejoice in God their Saviour. The shepherds are greatly afraid at the sight of the angel, and much more must they have been entranced when they see themselves suddenly encompassed by multitudes of the heavenly hosts, by thousands upon thousands of those bright spirits which surround the throne of the Eternal, and when they hear the celestial vaults resound with the glad hallelujahs proclaiming glory to God, and peace, good-will to man. The shepherds are no idle listeners to these triumphal strains; they do not stand gazing up with a fruitless desire that they might follow that blissful train to their home on high, and be taken from their lowly duties and their appointed work upon earth: they have been told what they are to do,—they have been told to seek the Lord while He may be found, to call upon Him while He is near. He has come down to visit them in great humility, and they feel that it is their business to receive Him in the way in which He has been pleased to reveal Himself to them; and the language of their hearts is the language of the inspired Psalmist,—“O come let us worship and fall down before the Lord our Maker; for He is the Lord our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the

sheep of His hand." The Galilean shepherds are the first to seek and the first to find the new-born Saviour. Hastening to Bethlehem, the city of David, there they find Him exactly as the angel had described,—in swaddling bands; for He who had bound the mighty ocean, and placed a poor barrier of sand as a limit that it should not overpass, had Himself consented to be bound for us, and straitened in the bands of our frail humanity as a feeble infant, to receive on the lap of an earthly mother the worship of those who had faith enough to believe that the strength of God could be perfected in the weakness of man. The shepherds had just been encompassed with celestial glories; and while the heavenly vision in its surpassing brightness was still fresh in their minds, all the magnificence of this our earth would have seemed to them but as an idle pageant; and had they found the Saviour in the gorgeous palace of Herod, instead of the poor manger of Bethlehem, their self-abasement could not have been lowlier, or their adoration more profound. With joyful hearts they tell forth the glad tidings of great joy which should be to all people. But strange to say, they are listened to with a sort of wondering incredulity, which brings no fellow-worshippers to the feet of the Saviour. Some, perhaps, on seeing the radiant looks of those simple men, and on hearing their words full of life and fervour, are almost persuaded to believe and adore; others, too wise to risk being deluded, receive as

idle tales the most momentous intelligence ever brought to the ear of man. The Blessed Virgin, we are told, "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart;" for though it is often said of her who ought best to have understood, that she, too, "understood not" the wonderful things told her of her Son, yet she ever received them in faith, and with reverence treasured them up in her heart, to think over them in solitude and silence; just as we, too, might treasure up and dwell upon some bright intimation too great for us to understand, but which, like a lightning-flash, seems to open the heavens above us, and for a transitory moment to give us an earnest of "the things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

CHAPTER III.

PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE.

"They brought Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord."—LUKE ii. 22.

WE have seen that the decree which went forth from Rome at the time of our Lord's first advent brought the poor but upright parents of the Saviour to the city of David to be taxed;—and thus the doings of men, even of bad men, are made to fulfil the purposes of God.

After the days of purification appointed by the Jewish law were over, the Blessed Virgin, accompanied by Joseph, took the infant Saviour up to the temple, to present Him to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice "according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle-doves and two young pigeons;" and by this humble offering to shew forth at once her poverty and her obedience.

The account given by St. Luke of our Lord's presentation is full of interest. The house of God seems to have been as deserted then as it generally is now, when in our week-day services we commemorate this remarkable event. No assembled multitudes were there to receive "the Son of the Highest;"

22 SCRIPTURE RECORD OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

no magnificent preparations had been made to receive the "King of kings." There were none to do Him homage but the faithful few who still remembered that the house of God was the house of prayer,—and, believing that what He had promised He would also surely perform, waited hopefully and patiently for the consolation of Israel. Amongst those who were continually in the temple praising and blessing God was Simeon, the just and devout, to whom it had been revealed that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ; and Anna the prophetess, a widow full of years and piety, who served God with fastings and prayers, night and day. These righteous persons never thought of deserting the house of the Lord because of the covetous practices of those who had made that house a den of thieves; they never thought of abandoning the righteous teaching and holy ordinances of their Church, because the Scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat: while the Scriptures were read to them every Sabbath-day, while those who bore rule over them still taught them the Word of God, they were content to follow the godly teaching, while they avoided the ungodly practices. Doubtless, in the piety of their hearts, they prayed for their unfaithful pastors, and thanked God for having in their Church, as He has done in ours, rendered the efficacy of His holy ordinances independent of the personal piety of those who administered them, and by giving His people His own

written Word, rendered them independent of the unauthorized teaching of those who sought to make that Word of none effect through their vain traditions. Though the Shechinah of God's glorious presence, which once visibly illuminated His temple, had been removed from the eye of sense, it shone brightly to the eye of faith: His true servants believed that where two or three were gathered together in that holy place where He had recorded His great Name, He would still be in the midst of them, to hear their prayers and to grant their supplications. As they believed, so was it done unto them; for suddenly, in the comparative solitude and silence of the temple of the Lord, this little knot of worshippers is blessed with the vision of Him, "the Desire of all nations," the true Shechinah of God's presence upon earth, the true Light which was "to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of His people Israel."

Overpowering, indeed, must have been the rapturous emotions of the aged Simeon as he encircled in his withered arms "Him whom the heaven of heavens could not contain." No wonder that he prayed to depart in the peace with which this blissful sight must have filled his aged bosom—to depart in peace before the world came back upon him, to cast, as it ever will cast, its baneful shadow upon the brightness of all heavenly things. Inspired at that moment by the Holy Spirit, Simeon declares that the Child he is gazing upon is "sent for the

fall and the rising again of many in Israel,"—the fall of those who, "refusing their own mercies," bring upon themselves that second death, to redeem from which there can be no second Saviour; and the rise of those who, sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, catch the blessed sound of His voice, and awake at His bidding to a life of righteousness. To the Blessed Virgin the aged Simeon prophesies an inheritance of woe,—a sword is to go through her soul, and a sharp and piercing anguish which every bereaved mother has in its measure felt and understood. The aged Simeon having finished his prophetical hymn of praise, Anna the prophetess takes up the theme, and speaks of this mighty salvation to all who were, like herself, "waiting for the consolation of Israel." This little knot of worshippers is entirely engrossed by the infant Saviour; they speak but of Him, their praise is of Him alone. The Blessed Virgin receives not the homage, but the blessing, of the aged Simeon, and both she and Joseph, we are told, " marvelled " at those things which were spoken of their Son. Why did they marvel? Had they not heard greater things than these? Had Mary so soon forgotten the declaration of the angel Gabriel, that He who should be born of her should be called the Son of the Highest? Had not Joseph, too, been miraculously warned of the exalted nature of Him who so loved us as to take our nature upon Him, and to be made the Son of Man, that we might be made the sons of

God? How is it that, in the various accounts given us in Scripture, the Blessed Virgin is represented to us as "marvelling," and not understanding the things spoken of or by her Son? With great simplicity of mind and ready faith she receives these things, and reverentially lays them up to ponder them in her heart; but assuredly she is never represented to us in the slightest degree as realizing the exalted nature of Him to whom she had given birth.

It is certainly true that both Joseph and the Blessed Virgin had been under the influence of miraculous manifestations: to both, the angel of God had been sent; to both, intimations of the Divinity of the coming Saviour had been given. We must, however, remember that miraculous interpositions alone do not necessarily make a lasting impression upon the minds of men; indeed, it is in itself a miracle, how quickly the most stupendous events are forgotten, how rapidly the impression of them passes away from the mind—even as rapidly as the golden clouds of a brilliant sunset pass away and are lost amidst the shadows of returning twilight. All the miracles of our blessed Lord before His resurrection were unable to fix upon Himself the hearts of His people: this was the case not merely with the idle multitude, who cried one day "Hosanna to the Son of David," and the next, "Crucify Him," but it was also the case with His own chosen disciples, even with the three who

were privileged to ascend with Him the mount of the transfiguration,—where, having arrayed Himself in His vesture of light, they were permitted to look upon His glorified presence; permitted also to behold the risen saints of the Lord, and to listen to the awful voice of God from heaven, forbidding that any tabernacle should be raised for the worship of the creature, that any should share in the adoration due to His Son. But though it was given to Peter, to James, and to John thus to see the Saviour coming in His glory, how little did these three favoured disciples understand or fulfil the purpose for which this vision was vouchsafed to them! How little did it tend to confirm their faith, how quickly did it altogether pass away from their mind! For no sooner had the Saviour given Himself up to His enemies, in order to accomplish that decease at Jerusalem of which they had heard Him discourse with Moses and Elias, than they all forsook Him and fled! One of them so entirely forgetting whose glorious presence it was that had so lately dazzled and overpowered him, whose mighty power it was that had enabled him to feed assembled multitudes, whose gracious hand it was that had upheld him when treading on the boisterous waves of the sea, as thrice to deny the Master whose Deity had been so wonderfully manifested to him,—faithlessly declaring, “I know not the Man.” So unstable is our frail humanity, so utterly ineffectual is the memory of the past—of even

the miraculous past—to overcome the vividness of impression and the all-absorbing influence which the events of the present must ever exercise over the human mind. Weak and wanting, however, as these beloved disciples shewed themselves to be in the hour of trial, they were not cast off, but pitied, forgiven, brought back, and enabled at last to confess their Divine Master in the fires of persecution and in the presence of death; for though He went away in the flesh, He returned to them again in the spirit, to make His abode in their hearts, to be a continual presence within them, a never-absent power, a never-ceasing influence, working in them not only to *will*, but to *do*, and *so* helping their infirmities as to make them “faithful unto death,” and “more than conquerors, through Him that loved them.” Until this mighty influence descended upon them from on high, He was “not extreme to mark” what was in them,—the weakness of the flesh, and not the obduracy of the spirit; for it seemed impossible that they should be able always to bear in mind the actual presence of the Deity amongst them, and to realize the stupendous fact that He who ate and drank, and talked with them, as one of themselves, was in very truth the “King of kings, and Lord of lords;” that heaven was His throne and the earth His footstool, and they themselves but the dust under His feet. Perhaps it was His good pleasure that while dwelling with them as a friend, they

should thus for a time forget His greatness in His humiliation. We know what a remarkable change His appearance after His resurrection wrought in their minds; how His presence awed them; how even the impetuous Peter, when questioned by Him, could only reverently appeal to the omniscience of that eye which he felt was upon his heart. After the resurrection, the sisters of Lazarus would not have ventured to invite Him in the way they had done before, as an honoured but still a loved and familiar friend, to their hospitable board; the disciples then could not have taken secret counsel with Him, as it had been their wont to do, and to walk with Him in the house of God as friends. He had *risen*, but they remained *below*, and the distance was now too great between them; and so we find that after His resurrection He only appeared to them at intervals; nor were His visits prolonged, for though, when unknown, He was earnestly pressed to tarry with the disciples at Emmaus, yet as soon as He had revealed Himself He vanished and left them to themselves, to ponder over His words, and to marvel at His love, and to adore His majesty. Had the deep and awful feeling which His presence after His resurrection never failed to excite been constantly called forth or long prolonged, it might have been too trying for the mind of man, altogether too overwhelming for our frail humanity. None knew our weakness better than He who bore it, and none considered

it more tenderly than He did. Might it not have been the same in the case of the Blessed Virgin? Might it not have been intended that the human maternal affection, so strong in a woman's heart, should for a time be 'uppermost, and neutralize that awe and reverence with which she must even in infancy have approached her child, had she been able to realize in the faintest degree the immeasurable distance between Him, the mighty God, and herself, the creature of His hand? Had she been able to see Him as He was, and to rend the veil of infancy under which He shrouded His divine attributes, could she have cradled Him in her loving arms? Could she have lavished upon Him those tender offices which the helpless humanity He had deigned to assume demanded from her maternal care? And when, as in the case we have been considering, some remarkable occurrence brings back to her mind the miraculous circumstances of His birth, was it intended that these awakened feelings should last but for a moment, and should again be hushed to sleep with the Babe on her bosom? It seems impossible to account for what is told us of the Blessed Virgin in any other way than by supposing that she, like the disciples, was too weak to bear the overwhelming consciousness of ever-present Deity, and that her weakness, like theirs, was tenderly considered and permitted to remain until, with them, she was endowed with power from on high spiritually to realize His greatness and to

behold His glory. The holy Gospel is so concise, is so designedly and mercifully concentrated in its teaching, in order that, in spite of our earthly avocations, all may find time to acquaint themselves with God, that we are forbidden to suppose that anything which has there been recorded is without its intention and its use. When, therefore, we read that the mother of our Lord understood not the things that were spoken of and by her Son, and that she " marvelled " and was " amazed " at those things, we cannot but think that it was purposely to lead us to the conclusion that she was permitted at distant intervals to see glimpses of a glory too astonishing for her to realize, and then to relapse into that every-day state of our frail humanity when our thoughts and feelings naturally concentrate themselves upon the present, laying aside the past, as a something we have done with ; little heeding the future, as a something that as yet concerns us not.

CHAPTER IV.

ADORATION OF THE MAGI.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child, with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him.—ST. MATTHEW ii. 11.

“YOU alone have I known of all the people of the earth,” was the Almighty’s declaration to His people Israel. Before the coming of the Saviour, all other nations were idolatrous, and consequently also those countries from whence came the Magi, or kings of the East, mentioned in St. Matthew. The only Bible which God had vouchsafed to them was the starry heaven: in it they diligently studied, and in its bright hieroglyphics they sought to read the destiny of nations and the fate of individuals. These people of the East worshipped the host of heaven, for to them it had never been revealed that, at the bidding of Him who “commandeth the sun and it ariseth not,” that glorious god of their idolatry would one day sleep in his clouds, regardless of the voice of the morning. They knew not that the moon, their beauteous queen of heaven, would one day withdraw her light, “that the stars would fall to the

earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs when shaken by a mighty wind," and that the heavens themselves would depart "as a scroll that is rolled up," and disappear, with all the bright and fanciful images which the contemplation of them has ever called forth from the speculative mind of man. But as God never left Himself without a witness in the hearts of His creatures, however idolatrous these Eastern sages were, they nevertheless might have listened so attentively to the still small voice within them as to raise their minds from the visible things of the creation to their great Creator. Looking without upon the firmament, His handy-work, and considering with wonder and admiration "the moon and stars which He had made," they might also have looked within upon themselves; they might have thought how much more wonderful than all the material objects of creation was the intelligent mind that considered them,—“the mind that sheds a light on what it sees;” they might have considered the glorious faculties with which that mind had been endowed. Reason, meditating and in some measure understanding the wonders of creation; Imagination, soaring beyond this outward scene, gazing not upon the temporal things which *are seen*, but upon the eternal things which are not seen; Memory, like the careful householder, bringing out of its treasures things new and old; giving back one thought after another to enlighten the mind that had lost them, even as one bright star

after another is brought back to the heaven from which they had disappeared. In thus considering themselves, these Eastern sages might have said with the Psalmist, "What is man that Thou visitest him, or the son of man that Thou regardest him?" Is he indeed but as a shadow that declineth, as a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away? When the material structure so fearfully and wonderfully made, the outward temple of the body, in which he thinks, and moves, and has his being, is laid in the dust, is there none to raise it up again, to perfect its reason, to purify its senses, to develope its glorious faculties? Shall the stars continue to keep their vigils, and unceasingly look down upon generation after generation, as they are swept from the face of the earth, and the intelligent mind lie for ever in silence in the grave? "Shall Thy wondrous works be known in the dark, Thy righteousness in the land where all things are forgotten?" — Thoughts such as these have passed through the mind of many a heathen sage, and made him ardently crave, not for more of the wisdom of this world, but for that spiritual enlightenment by which the God whom he ignorantly worshipped might be more perfectly declared unto him. If such was the righteous desire of these Eastern sages, most completely is that desire fulfilled. In the book of Genesis it is recorded that Abraham, having been commanded to leave his native country and to fix himself in the distant land of Canaan, was led out

by the hand of the Almighty, under the canopy of heaven, radiant with its thousands of stars, and commanded to look up and to number those stars, if he could for their multitude; the gracious promise being then given to him, that innumerable as they were, so innumerable should his seed become. Memorable, indeed, was that blessed night which God had illuminated with so bright a promise, and not less memorable was the night on which the same Almighty hand, leading out the worthy descendants of the Patriarch* in a different land, but under the same starry heavens, miraculously revealed to them the fulfilment of that gracious promise, given to the Patriarch upwards of three thousand years before, by the advent of Him whose day Abraham "saw and was glad;" and in joyful anticipation thereof, had been satisfied to leave his friends, his country, and his gods, and to go forth he knew not whither at the bidding of Him who had promised to be "his shield and exceeding great reward." These Eastern Magi are now to be called upon to exercise the same faith shewn by Abraham; they are to be invited to leave their country, their friends, all that they love, behind them; they, too, must go forth in faith; they, too, are to be satisfied, if, after a long and painful pilgrimage, they behold Him that is born King of the Jews. For to worship at the feet of the new-born Monarch, to be permitted to present their gifts to the Ma-

* Epiphanius makes them descendants of the Patriarch by Keturah.

jesty of Heaven, is to be their "exceeding great reward."

While following their contemplative avocation, while adoring the Maker of the universe in the only temple in which for them He had recorded His great Name, they are suddenly astonished by the appearance of a new wonder in the heavens. For as by wisdom man knew not God, these Eastern sages needed a miraculous revelation quite as much as the simple shepherds of Galilee; more so, indeed,—for the shepherds were wiser than the learned, for they had been "instructed out of the law of the Lord;" they had heard of the ministry of angels; they knew about David, their royal Shepherd, and they had been taught to expect their long-promised Messiah. So far instructed, to them an angel is sent, who speaks of the city of David, of the Saviour who is Christ the Lord: whereas to these Magi a star is sent,—for it is in the stars alone that these earnest men had been trying to read the ways of God. The voice of the star speaks to them, not of David, not of Christ, but of a King, the symbol to them of majesty and power; and they readily understand how great that King must be whose coming is so wonderfully and gloriously proclaimed. The wise men of our day have written much upon the exact nature of the light which guided the Magi to Bethlehem, but the whole occurrence is so entirely miraculous, that learned disquisitions on such a subject must surely be out of place. The ordinary

works of God's providence, indeed, are especially fitted for such disquisitions, and the more these works are investigated, the more will such investigations fill the mind with the wisdom, power, and goodness of God; but lest man should exalt the work above the Maker, and should forget that God is not bound by His own laws, or fettered by that regularity by which, for our sakes, He makes all things to know their appointed season, He startles us by what we call a miracle,—a departure from the general laws of His providence,—to make our spirits attentive, and to prepare our minds to receive some fresh intimation of His will or some new revelation of His glory. Such was the miraculous light which appeared to the Magi, and they were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Others might have reasoned, they believed; others might have speculated, they trusted: in simple faith and unhesitating obedience, they abandon themselves at once to the guidance of God's bright messenger; and follow as it leads over mountain pass and lowly vale, over barren wild and flowery mead, until at length they are conducted in safety to the city of Jerusalem,—when suddenly the faithful messenger disappears: for God has never permitted miraculous interposition to intervene where His written Word is at hand to instruct and to guide us. It must have been a great trial of faith to these devoted men, to be thus seemingly forsaken at the very moment they had fondly thought themselves on the point of attaining the ob-

ject for which they had been satisfied to encounter so much ; surely their hearts must have sunk within them, thus to find themselves in a strange land, amongst a strange people, forsaken by the light of God's presence, which had so long gladdened and cheered them on their way. Like the true servants of God, however, they may for a moment be cast down, but they are not discouraged ; perplexed, but not in despair ; and finding themselves no longer under miraculous guidance, they make use of the ordinary means of attaining their object, which God had now placed within their reach, and they diligently enquire where they are to seek for Him who is born King of the Jews ; for, said they, " we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him." What a lesson these simple words convey to the careless and unbelieving people of God !—it seemed to say to them, in accents of reproof and condemnation, We have never been, like you, His chosen people,—to us no revelation of His word has ever been sent ; no Shechinah of His glorious presence ever illuminated our temples, no voice of prophet after prophet has ever spoken to us of all His gracious purposes, no miracles of His power have ever been given to instruct us in His laws and to guide us in His ways. One token alone has been vouchsafed to us ;—it was enough ; it said to our hearts, " Seek ye My face !" and our hearts were ready to answer, " Thy face, Lord, will we seek." " We have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship

Him." The arrival of these distinguished travellers, and the extraordinary nature of the enquiry made by them, cause no small stir in the great city. Indeed, it is said that Herod on his throne is troubled and all Jerusalem with him. Herod is troubled, for he fears to lose his crown,—uneasily as it must have ever sat upon his guilty head! How his people, too, are troubled! for perhaps they fear that the axe is about to be laid unto the root of the unfruitful tree, that justice has closed the lips of mercy, and that there is no one now to plead, "Let it alone another year." Herod has very quickly decided upon his course in this emergency, for the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. When they apprehend loss to their persons or possessions, they never put off to a more convenient season the all-important consideration of how they may best avert the coming danger. Great emergencies, they imagine, sometimes necessitate great crimes: to get a crown, or to keep one, has ever been the plea of the ambitious for outraging the laws of God and man; and when successful, the plea is too often allowed, and the offence overlooked. The king of Judæa determined at once to rid himself of this dreaded usurper of his worldly dignities, and charges the Magi, when they shall have paid their adoration to the new-born Monarch, to return to Jerusalem, that he, too, might go and do likewise. Alas! for Herod, that he did not mean what he said, and act out so righteous a determination.

By diligent enquiry the Magi received the information they sought after: they were told by the scribes that Bethlehem, the least of the principal cities of Judah, was designated in the book of prophecy as the birthplace of Him they were so earnestly seeking; and thus they are directed to the Saviour by those very learned scribes and expounders of the law who could point the way to others without ever thinking of following it themselves;—one amongst the many proofs given us in Holy Writ, that the tree of knowledge is not the tree of life. No doubt the chief priests and scribes prided themselves upon being able to instruct these distinguished travellers, and upon having an opportunity of displaying their knowledge of the letter of the law; but it is quite evident that they did not in the least trouble themselves to understand spiritually, or apply practically, the prophetic intimations respecting the first advent of our Lord. It is true that the Jews had in their day many individual interpretations respecting the Messiah's *first* coming, as we have respecting His *second* advent. "Some said one thing and some another," and "there was a division amongst them^b;" and as certainty upon such a subject was not to be obtained, perhaps the doctors of the law considered it wiser to avoid the risk of falling into error by remaining in ignorance. As infallibility of interpretation has never been given to man, it is quite

^b See St. John vii.

certain that we must needs see very darkly, and often submit to find ourselves entirely mistaken when trying to understand the mysterious prophecies relating to "the things which are coming upon the earth:" at the same time it must be our bounden duty to study these prophecies; for St. Peter has told us, "they are as a light in a dark place, to which we do well to take heed;" and while we pursue the enquiry in a spirit of charity to our fellow-men and of reverence to God, the very difficulties with which the subject is surrounded will serve to abate the pride of human learning by shewing us that there are things quite above and beyond the reach of the highest intellectual capacity. And most assuredly, in thus humbly seeking to understand the ways of God, it is far better to risk a thousand mistakes than, by assuming the cloak of philosophical indifference, to be like a Gallio, who, while he prided himself upon his supreme wisdom in keeping aloof from the vain contentions around him, was in very truth committing of all mistakes the greatest, of all follies the most irrational, by caring for none of those things the most worthy of the patient investigation and the thoughtful consideration of the rational and intelligent mind of man. The knowledge of these expounders of Holy Writ, limited as it was to the letter of the law, while it condemned themselves, proved most valuable to these Eastern Magi. By it they sought, and they found, the way which led them to the Saviour: they

never stopped to enquire who was going that way, or to consider why the men who pointed it out to them did not follow it themselves. What was it to these earnest men, if some did not believe? Could their unbelief make the Word of God of none effect? Wisely selfish, they thought but of their own duty,—and speedily were they recompensed; for no sooner had they reached the City of David, when, to their “exceeding great joy,” the beautiful star which had led them from their home reappeared, guiding them onwards till it suddenly stood still, as a servant in the presence of his master, over the humble birthplace of the King of kings. There it stood at the door of the manger, as if to give them a cheering welcome, as if to say to them, Well done ye good and faithful servants; enter and behold Him ye have so long, so patiently, sought after,—enter and behold Him in whose presence is life, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore. The invitation is joyfully accepted; they enter and cast their crowns at the feet of the infant Saviour, and bring their presents unto Him who ought to be feared,—gold, frankincense, and myrrh,—all symbolical of the sinless perfection, the divine purity, and the bitter suffering of the Man of Sorrows, the Holy One of God. The Magi, having seen *Him*, worshipped *Him*, and offered to *Him* their costliest treasures, have fulfilled their mission, and are satisfied to depart in peace; and being warned

in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned, another way to their own land, there to spread the glad tidings of salvation among those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.

In reading the account given by St. Matthew, of the visit of the kings to the house at Bethlehem, it certainly does seem strange that no mention whatever is made of their presenting gifts or offering any homage whatever to the Virgin Mother, who, holding her Son in her arms, and supporting as it were the feebleness of Infancy, seemed at that moment legitimately to demand some portion of the adoration offered to the Saviour. Accustomed as these Magi were to the worship of the Queen of heaven, under the symbol of the Moon, which, dark in herself, shone so sweetly and brightly by the beams which she borrowed from the fountain of light, it seemed as if their former worship would have naturally led them at such a moment to deify the Mother for the sake of the Son. It is said, indeed, by the Church of Rome that such was the case,—that, though Scripture is silent, tradition has spoken. But if tradition is right, Scripture has not only been silent, but in error; for the words of the Evangelist shew, that when the Magi came into the house and found the young Child and His Mother, they fell down and worshipped, not *them*, but *Him*, and presented gifts, not to *them*, but to *Him*. Others there are, who, admitting the correctness of Scrip-

ture, yet pretend that the fact of the shepherds, the Magi, or the primitive Christians, never having been called upon to worship the Blessed Virgin in the earlier times of the Church, is no reason whatever why we should not be called upon by competent authority to do so now. All truth, they say, was not given at once,—it was given to us by degrees, as we could bear it. But surely *this truth*, if it be truth, involving as it did the adoration of the creature, in addition to that of the Creator, was just the very truth that man was most capable of bearing; and no plausible reason can be given why, if it be right to worship the Virgin *now*, because she was the mother of our Lord, it should not have equally been right to worship her *then*; why, if it be *really* a pious act for the kings of the earth to bring presents to her now, and to crown her multiplied images with the golden diadem, and to array them with the poor tinsel of our foolish and frivolous world, it should not have been equally right for these Eastern kings to bow down in adoration before her living shrine, and humbly to offer their gifts to her acceptance, as well as to the acceptance of Him, the Son of the Highest. That they *did it not* must be attributed to the divine guidance, which, having led them in safety to the feet of the Saviour, kept them close to the worship of Him to whom alone such worship is due, of Him “in whom dwelt all *the fulness of the Godhead bodily*,” and

who therefore thought it no robbery to be "*equal with God.*" For Scripture has told us, that not only does all blessing and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, belong "unto our God that sitteth on the throne," but also "unto the Lamb for ever and ever. Amen."

CHAPTER V.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

Behold the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young Child, and His mother, and flee into Egypt.—ST. MATTHEW ii. 13.

VERY soon after the adoration of the Magi, Herod issued his cruel decree ; for finding himself “ taken in the craftiness which he had imagined,” in consequence of God having warned the wise men against returning to Jerusalem, he was “ exceeding wroth,” and “ sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.” Immediately upon the promulgation of this cruel edict, an angel is sent to Joseph to warn him of the impending danger, and to command him to “ Arise, and to take the young Child and His mother, and to flee into Egypt.” For when the Son of God consented to be made man, He had counted the cost, and was prepared to pay the penalty, for He knew that His life on earth was to be one of suffering and

sorrow. He submitted to all the perils and hardships of our earthly existence, content to lay aside for a little moment His divine omnipotence ; He was willing to be strengthened, like us, in the inner man, by the eternal Spirit ; to be comforted and perfected like us by the blessed influences of the self-same Spirit, poured out "without measure" upon His sacred head, because He only, of all born into this world, was able *without measure* to receive them. When He said, "A body hast Thou prepared for Me," He also said, "Lo ! I come to do Thy will, O Lord. I am content to do it ; yea, Thy law is within My heart." As man, He consented to be guided by the watchful providence of His heavenly Father, and to use all the ordinary means, when those means were sufficient, for self-defence and self-preservation. No miracle is at hand now to save Him from the cruelty of Herod ; no legions of angels are sent to convey the house of Bethlehem beyond the reach of the bloodthirsty tyrant. His parents must provide for His safety, and, like the innocent Joseph, He must seek in Egypt, in a heathen land, a refuge from the fierce persecution of His own brethren, from the cruelty of those who prided themselves upon being *exclusively* "the people of God." History has never recorded an act of greater atrocity than the edict of Herod, and yet the instigator of it might have wished, could it have been done with safety, to have spared himself this effusion of innocent blood. But ambition spoke

loudly of the necessity of ridding himself of the dreaded usurper of his crown and his dignity, and necessity, the tyrant's plea, hardened his heart and deadened his conscience. Such is the miserable folly of short-sighted man, who, forgetting by whose permission kings rule and princes decree judgment, thinks to establish and prolong his power upon earth by transgressing God's righteous laws. But as the bands and ropes with which the Philistines vainly sought to bind the mighty Samson became but as "flax burnt before the fire," so utterly vain and ineffectual must ever be the miserable devices of the wicked, when directed against the designs of Omnipotence; for "He that is in heaven shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision." Herod might indeed for a short moment have flattered himself that he was at peace in his possessions, and that he had succeeded in doing singly what his people did afterwards collectively, when they "killed the Prince of Life." But the day of reckoning was at hand. Very quickly after the perpetration of this bloody deed was the wretched culprit called upon to receive that dread summons which none may refuse to hear,—“Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” Very quickly was he called upon, not to *believe*, for the day of grace and of faith was over, but he was called upon to *feel* that there is “no peace for the wicked,” even in the grave; that its silence could not shut out the cry of the bereaved mother, the wail of the desolate Rachel;

that its darkness could not shut out the sweet faces of the murdered innocents, become to him the dread messengers of retributive justice, though they might have smiled in blissful ignorance on the glittering sword which cut them down like the early flowers, and transplanted them to the paradise of God. It is very fearful to contemplate the doom which has been pronounced upon the impenitent in the Word of God. The mind turns gladly from so awful a theme, but it is well to remember that a woe has also been pronounced against those who cry "Peace, peace," when God has said "there is no peace;" against those who "strengthen the hands of the wicked by promising them life." The prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New, "knowing the terrors of the Lord," *persuaded* men "to flee from the wrath to come." There are those now who think it right "to preach another Gospel," in this respect, from the one we have received; who, by mitigating the terrors of the Lord, dissuade men from fleeing "the wrath to come;" and who, by opening another way to heaven hereafter, instead of the way of faith and repentance here, dissuade men from believing that "*now* is the appointed time, *now* is the day of salvation." This is done upon the plea of justifying the ways of God to the reason of man, and of charitably alluring to His worship those who, it is said, are revolted by the orthodox teaching of the last eighteen centuries. We must, however, beware lest, in "speaking smooth things" to allure,

we "prophesy deceits" to ruin men's souls; for as everlasting happiness is not ours to give, so everlasting punishment is not ours to abolish. There is One "that openeth and no man shutteth," that "shutteth and no man openeth." It was His voice, the voice of the All-merciful, that reiterated with such fearful solemnity those terrible words of "the worm that dieth not," of "the fire that is not quenched." It was His hand, that gracious hand, which when it opens "fills all things living with plenteousness," that for once drew aside the dark curtain which severs the world of sense from the world of spirits, and displayed to our affrighted gaze one who had found indeed that "hell was truth seen too late," and who, without hope for himself, pleaded that Lazarus might be sent to his brethren, that, hearing the warning voice of one who had risen from the dead, they at least might be persuaded to hold fast by the teaching of Moses and the prophets, and be saved from realizing the truth of God's threatenings by rejecting His promises. This warning voice has been sent to *us*, for almost the last words uttered by our risen Master before His ascension into heaven were words not only of blessing, but of judgment—words confirming the teaching of the prophets, that as "verily as there is a reward for the righteous," so "doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth." By casting aside all these awful warnings, by supposing them given to impress upon our minds an exaggerated apprehension in-

stead of an awful and inevitable reality, our imaginations may wander at will over the wide field of eternity. We may abolish everlasting punishment, and substitute in its stead a purgatory, in which time is to cleanse the soul; or a chaos, in which annihilation is to destroy it; and we may thus think to justify the ways of God to the reason of man, and get rid of future difficulties by denying their existence: but what shall we do with the difficulties of this *present* life? How shall we justify to the cavilling spirit the present mysterious providences of God? We cannot explain away the thousand cases of unmerited wretchedness, the frightful earthly calamities, which seem to contradict all our ideas of the perfect justice and infinite mercy of our heavenly Father^a. Faith alone can deal with these mysterious dispensations,—that faith which upheld the Psalmist when his confidence was shaken and his foot had well-nigh slipped at seeing the ungodly in such prosperity, and the just so grievously afflicted; that faith which made the patriarch exclaim in the midst of his agonies, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;” that child-like faith, in short, which—

“doth not fly
His angry mother’s hand, but climbs more nigh,
And quenches in his tears her flaming eye.”

^a It is recorded of Dr. Johnson, that he positively refused to believe in the account of the terrible earthquake at Lisbon which happened in his day, because he considered so awful a calamity to be irreconcilable with his notions of the justice and mercy of God. The disbelief and specious reasoning of so great a man did not, however, prevent the catastrophe having really and truly taken place.

Clouds and darkness are round about the judgment-seat of God. Faith may see through the clouds, but Reason can never dissipate them. The origin of evil, its power over the souls which God has made, the inseparable union which exists between sin and misery, the madness of those who, even in this life, willingly endure the suffering rather than give up the sin,—this is the mystery of iniquity. The means taken by Him who “willeth not the death of the sinner,” to release us from the thralldom of Satan, to cleanse our soul by the blood of Christ, to regenerate it by the power of His Divine Spirit, and to renew once more His lost image within us,—this is “the mystery of godliness.” “Angels desire to look into it;” man has no faculty by which he can comprehend it; for we must sound the depths of Satan before we can rightly measure the greatness of God’s redeeming love in Christ Jesus our Lord:—

“It is high as heaven,—what canst thou do?
Deeper than hell,—what canst thou know?”

Surely, then, amidst so much to perplex and to confound us, it must be our soundest wisdom and truest charity to believe ourselves, and to induce others to take God at His word. For if, as some affirm, there be no eternal punishment, we cannot bring it upon ourselves by believing in it; and if it be really so, as God has told us, (and who so daring as altogether to deny the possibility?), then are we safe every way. “The kingdom of heaven has been opened to all believers;” so that if all were believers, hell

would be abolished, and destructions would come to a perpetual end ; and it is just to effect this glorious result that ambassadors have been sent to beseech us to be reconciled to God. It is to effect this merciful purpose that before the end " the Gospel *must* be preached in all the world," as a witness " that God is long-suffering to usward, not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance," for " There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus ;" there is no condemnation even to those who are blind, not from their fault, but from their misfortune : they " have no sin," and will have no sorrow. The only condemnation pronounced by the Saviour is upon those who " prefer darkness to light ;" upon those who, while rejecting His words, nevertheless " say they see." *Their* sin remaineth, and while sin remaineth, sorrow, its inseparable companion, must remain also ; for it is as impossible that darkness can co-exist with light, as sin with the blessedness of heaven. Let us then glorify God, who, in revealing His fearful judgments, has also made for us a way to escape ; and though narrow is the way, " whosoever will" may pass over it : and if even, as the Mahometan fables, the bridge which severs time from eternity be made of a single hair, yet if we " lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us," the hair will bear us over in safety, and He that is gone before will receive us, and as the magnet attracts the quivering steel, so will He draw us to Himself, that where He is " there

we may be also." Let us, then, rejoice in His gracious promises, and tremble at His fearful judgments: the hard saying and the comforting assurance are both from Him. Our everlasting happiness and our everlasting misery are declared by the same voice and in the same words, so that if we abolish our fear we also endanger our hope. Nor can we stop here, for as he who breaks one of the least of God's commandments, and teaches men to do so, is guilty of all, so is he that sets aside any one of the doctrines of the Word of God; for as the sun has many rays, and but one light, so the Gospel has many doctrines, yet it has but one faith. If, then, the faith which links them all together in harmonious unity be shaken, one surrender after the other must be made: once abolish the penalty for sin, and a ransom is no longer needed, and thus the atonement becomes unnecessary; and when this is given up, the incarnation, the Deity of the Saviour, and the eternity of the Trinity cannot long be maintained,—nor *is* it long maintained; and so the mischief progresses, until the Gospel becomes a myth, the Saviour another Socrates, His death upon the cross nothing more than "the greatest moral act ever done in the world;" and all the truths of revelation being thus blotted out, we are reduced to the condition of the Athenians of old, for nothing is left to us but an altar with this inscription,—“To the UNKNOWN God.”

This subject has been dwelt upon not willingly,

but because it seemed right that, while considering the false doctrines which are sapping the faith of a sister Church, we should also look "to ourselves;" for if the porter to whom the keys of God's house were given has proved unfaithful to his trust, "let us be not high-minded, but fear," lest we too "come into the same condemnation^b." For if our faith be shaken, and our crown taken from us, it matters little whether it be done by Romish or Protestant error; whether it be by those who say "I am of Paul," or those who say "I am of Cephas." Great need have we to walk circumspectly, for it is not the wit of the satirist, nor the sneer of the scorner, nor the open blasphemy of the professed infidel, that our Church has now to dread: her "foes are those of her own household;" she is betrayed by him who drinks of her cup and rests in her bosom; and justly may she take up the pathetic lament of the Psalmist, and say in the words of the Holy One, "It is not an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour: for then I could have borne it. Neither was it mine adversary, that did magnify himself against me: for then peradventure I would have hid myself from him. But it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and my own familiar friend."

To return to our subject, we find that the death of Herod made it no longer necessary for the holy family to prolong their exile in Egypt, so the angel of the Lord is sent again to Joseph, to tell him that

^b See Matt. xvi. 19, and Mark xiii. 34.

they who had "sought the young Child's life" were dead. By which expression we may infer that not only Herod, but also the accomplices of his cruel designs, had been suddenly overtaken by the righteous vengeance of God. The world generally knows the prime agent in public acts of atrocity, and upon his guilty head alone the world's execration rests. God, however, also knows the base hearts of those who lend themselves to execute what the ruling mind can only conceive, and who in cold blood carry out designs which, but for their wicked compliance could never have been perpetrated. All danger for the life of the young child being now removed, Joseph is once more commanded to return with Him and His mother to the land of Israel; but hearing that Archelaus reigned, "he feared," — and with reason, for Archelaus was said to have inherited the cruel disposition of his father Herod. But God, who is ever compassionate to fears which proceed not from want of faith in His good Providence, but from anxiety to fulfil the charge which He has entrusted to our keeping, reassured Joseph in a dream, who then "turned aside to the parts of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." There, in that despised city of Nazareth, did the Saviour "grow up as a tender plant out of a dry ground," as a sweet flower under the shadow of a barren rock, filling the atmosphere around Him

with a hidden virtue, stealing into the soul and blessing it, like the mysterious visitations of the Spirit of God; and as in this peaceful retreat the quiet years chased each other, bringing with them no startling changes, no heavenly interpositions, it is not surprising if the happy parents of this poor but blessed home forgot, as time went on, the miraculous incidents of the past,—if the prophecy of coming woe, pronounced by the aged Simeon, no longer weighed upon the mind of the Virgin-mother, and if she ceased to ponder over the things which she had laid up in her heart,—satisfied to rest in her present happiness, to bask in the sunshine of the gracious presence of her Son, and to watch Him as He “increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE ANXIOUS SEARCH.

Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? . . . Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.—ST. LUKE ii. 48.

ST. PAUL has forcibly contrasted the sufferings brought upon our race through the sin of the first Adam, with the blessings freely bestowed upon us through the righteousness of the second Adam. He has described the whole creation as groaning and travailing in pain, and anxiously awaiting the manifestations of the sons of God, when the suffering cry of the oppressed will be exchanged for the joyful song of the redeemed, exulting in the glorious liberty with which Christ has made them free. We may go on with the subject, and contrast the exalted condition of him who brought sin into the world and the humiliation of Him who brought the remedy. For though the first Adam was of the earth, earthy, yet did he come from his Maker's hand in the very perfection of unfallen humanity—capable of comprehending at once the whole creation of God, of giving names to everything which God had made—capable

of receiving the keys of this wonderful world, and, as its lord and governor, of having all things put under his feet. Clear and vigorous, too, must have been the unclouded intellect and the unfallen reason of him who could hear the voice of God without fear, and walk with his Maker as a man with his friend. Great, however, as the first Adam was, he owed allegiance to One greater than himself: he was under a law which never has been and never can be abolished, in time or in eternity; a law to which angels and men must alike submit—which the Son of God was content to be under, when He made Himself “inferior to the Father as touching His manhood,” and came down from heaven, not to do His own will, but the will of His “Father and our Father,” of His “God and our God.” This law of obedience Adam broke daringly and presumptuously, without the shadow of an excuse to palliate the sin; for it was not in the desolate wilderness, it was not while writhing under the pangs of a long and exhausting abstinence, it was not while oppressed and heavy laden with the iniquities of a sinful world, that our first parent was tempted to seek by disobedience a temporary relief from the extremity of human suffering: it was in the midst of abundance, in the garden of Eden, where every blessing was showered upon him without measure by his all-bountiful Creator, that the first Adam fell from his integrity; for, not satisfied to be all he could be as man, he craved to be “as God,” and by seeking after

the knowledge which was to make him great, he forfeited the wisdom which had made him happy. What a contrast does this, the felicity of the first Adam, the lightness of the yoke that was laid upon him, and the rebellion of the spirit which shook off that light and easy yoke, present to the poor and humble condition, the long and heavy suffering, the patient endurance, the perfect obedience, of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven! For when He came forth from His Father, He did not "clothe Himself with majesty and honour," or "deck Himself with light as with a garment," or "make the clouds His chariot," to terrify us with the brightness of His presence. He did not come to us in the whirlwind or in the fire, but He came to us in the still small voice, saying to the soul of the afflicted, "Be of good cheer;" to the trembling spirit, "It is I; be not afraid." He came to win us back by His love, and by His "gentleness to make us great." Divesting Himself of that glory which He had with the Father before the worlds began, He came down silently and softly, like the rain into a fleece of wool, like the tender drops that refresh and revivify the earth. Born as we are born, in utter helplessness and dependence, He humbled Himself to become even as a child that is weaned from his mother; and though ever perfect in all His divine attributes, in our nature He consented to increase in wisdom and in stature, and in favour not only with God, but also with man. For even at Nazareth, in that

hard and obdurate city, where afterwards the first cruel attempt was made upon His sacred life, and where He could do no mighty work because of their unbelief, even there, for awhile, His gentle presence in childhood, when no reproofs were in His mouth, won Him favour and conciliated the rough spirits around Him, fulfilling the words of the prophet, that a time would come when the fierce instincts of the lion and the bear would be curbed, and a little child should lead them. Thus did the true light steal gradually upon the world; thus did the kingdom of heaven come down upon us without observation, none saying "see here or see there;" "for the light shined in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not." Remarkable and mysterious is the total silence preserved in Holy Writ respecting the life of our blessed Lord until He entered upon His ministry, until "He could no longer be hid."

Of His great forerunner it was said that he should be "as a voice crying in the wilderness;" but of the Saviour it was declared that even during His ministry He should "not strive nor cry, nor should His voice be heard in the streets." If such was to be the meek and gentle character of His *public* life, how profoundly serene must have been that of His childhood! There must have breathed in the moral atmosphere around Him the calm stillness of a summer's day, when the sky is so cloudless, clear, and purely beautiful, that heaven and earth seem to

kiss each other, and to bring even to the restless and careworn spirit a foretaste of that "peace of God which passeth all understanding." Though it might then most truly be affirmed that in the Saviour's lowly home at Nazareth a greater than Solomon was there, one who of right could say, "I am wiser than the aged;" "I have more understanding than My teachers;" yet for twelve long years He grew up in silence and obscurity: no wonderful saying of His is repeated, no wonderful work is recorded of Him. He taught but by the holiness of His example; He reproved but by the purity of His life. Obedience was the first great lesson He condescended to learn, as if to shew us that obedience was the best and highest knowledge for a child to attain, and to practise it perfectly, its comprehensive duty. And so perfectly did He Himself practise this great duty of obedience, that no wonder if His parents were in time led to forget that He who was so ready to submit was also He whose right it was to command, and that while they were human He was divine. It might have been to awaken them out of an entire forgetfulness of His exalted nature that an incident occurs;—wonderful to say, the *only* incident recorded of our blessed Lord during the long period of thirty years! When He was twelve years of age, we are told by St. Luke that His parents went up to Jerusalem for the feast, and took the Saviour with them. On their return they miss their Son, but supposing Him to be in the company,

they go a day's journey without Him. It seems to us strange that the Virgin and Joseph should have been satisfied to remain so long deprived of that presence, which must have been as the very sunshine of their existence; but so it was: they went a day's journey without Him; their fears for His safety are then excited, and they begin an anxious search after Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance; and finding Him not, they return to Jerusalem "seeking Him,"—but they seek in vain. During this painful and anxious search, in the midst of her perplexity and despair, the prophecy of the aged Simeon may have returned to the mind of the Blessed Virgin, and she may have feared that the fatal sword was at hand to do its sad office, and to pierce her sorrowing heart. But it may be remarked, both of her and of Joseph, how entirely in spirit they cleave to the dust; how entirely engrossed they are with painful anticipation of mere bodily harm or accident which may have befallen their Son. No high consideration of His exalted nature seems to suggest to them the probability that, as with their great prophet Elijah, the celestial chariot and horses of fire might have been sent to bear Him to heaven, His own dwelling-place; or that, as with Enoch, angels might have taken Him away from a world unworthy of so gracious a presence. No; it is only amongst their kinsfolk and acquaintance,—it is only in the busy haunts of men, along the road to the great city, that they seek Him. For

three days they thus seek Him sorrowing, and then, in their perplexity and despair, they enter the temple at Jerusalem—not, it would seem from the narrative, to prosecute their search after Him there, but doubtless to “cry unto the Lord in their trouble, to deliver them out of their distress;” and in thus piously seeking their God they most unexpectedly find their Son, for there He is, calmly and quietly sitting in the midst of the doctors, not authoritatively teaching them, but meekly and attentively “hearing them and asking them questions.” St. Luke expressly tells us that when His parents saw Him they were amazed; and the Virgin, still trembling, and believing not for joy, accosts Him in language every mother so well understands,—a kind of half-tender, half-angry remonstrance at the unnecessary alarm, the painful search He had occasioned them:—“Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? . . . Thy father and I have sought Thee *sorrowing*.” Our blessed Lord’s answer to this pathetic address is very remarkable,—coming from Him whose first impulse was ever to wipe away the tear of sorrow, and tenderly to calm the agitations of the perturbed spirit. All that He does, however, on this occasion is to marvel at her ignorance, and to reprove her want of faith,—“Wherefore did ye seek Me?” as if He would have said, Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known *Me*? Could ye not think of Me but as a poor helpless sheep straying from its sheepfold; as a poor child of the dust, with neither wisdom

nor power to guide itself?—Wherefore did ye seek Me? Wist ye not, could ye not of yourselves understand, that where two or three were gathered together in My Father's name, *there* I should be found amongst them? “Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?” But we are told they understood not the saying which He spake unto them. For one little moment He had drawn aside the veil of childhood, and stood transfigured before them as the living Shechinah of the Temple, the Son of the Most High God. But, like the apostles on the mount, they “wist not what to say;” the eyes of their understanding were heavy,—the vision was too bright for them: “they understood not the saying that He spake unto them.” But as was ever her wont, the blessed Virgin, though *not* understanding His words, laid them up reverently in her heart—at that moment incapable, perhaps, of considering their mysterious import, so full must the mother's heart have been of the one blessed thought that the child she had sought after sorrowing was restored to her;—the Son she had lost was found!—The Saviour, having asserted at this early age his independence of all earthly control, by assuming the divine authority which He “had power to take up and had power to lay down,” He is pleased in all humility to resign Himself again to the guidance of His mother, to return to her lowly home at Nazareth, and to become once more subject to His parents.

After this incident, a very long interval occurs

before the pen of inspiration records for our learning anything more respecting our divine Saviour. His life for eighteen years becomes a blank in sacred history, and it is to be feared that it is also a blank in our minds. . It is to be feared that, compressing His whole life upon earth into the three and a half years of His public ministry, we forget, perhaps indeed we cannot realize, the stupendous fact of His long earthly sojourn amid the changes and chances of this mortal life. Lost as His existence seems to have been to us for all these years, little as we can estimate it, yet surely even *then* virtue went out of Him for the healing of our sin-sick souls. For what a beautiful lesson do these eighteen years of the Saviour's passive endurance and patient waiting give to us, His ever impatient and restless creatures! How did it reprove the rashness of Moses for thinking his people would surely understand that he was to be their deliverer; for rushing on uncalled, and inaugurating by a deed of blood that great deliverance, which, after forty years of seclusion and tranquil preparation, he was at last permitted to accomplish! How did it reprove the impatience of the Israelites, who, saved from their enemies, returned in heart to Egypt, and were ready to give up the land of promise because of the tediousness of the way, and the *weariness* of their spirits! How did it reprove the impatient zeal of Elijah, who, burning with jealousy for the honour of his Master, and unable to bear with the wicked around him, prayed to be delivered

from a struggle that was becoming too much for him ; and requested for himself that he might die, saying, " It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life^a ! " How does it reprove the impatience of the captive exile hastening to be loosed ; of the poor sufferer chained to the bed of sickness, eager to be up and about his master's business ! How does this wonderful lesson at all times reprove the restlessness of men, even of good men, who with a righteous purpose in view rush on, and in their inconsiderate haste sometimes even consent to do the little but certain evil for the sake of the great but uncertain good their projects are to achieve ; and who, not always content to " work while it is called to-day," crowd to-morrow into to-day, and thus by a suicidal attempt to do more than they are equal to, or called upon to undertake, cut short a life of usefulness, and it may be, mar God's providential designs of making them in His own appointed time the blessed instruments of good to mankind ! Most urgently do we need to ponder over this portion of our Lord's life of passive endurance upon earth, now that our world by its incessant agitation and feverish excitement gives tokens of some coming catastrophe ; now that the many are running to and fro, all making haste to be rich, or wise, or powerful ; now that knowledge is increased, and the evil one whispering his flatteries in the ear of the votaries of science and intellect, urging them to press forward to the

^a 1 Kings xix. 4.

mark of their high calling, and promising that soon "they shall be as gods," subject to no law but their will, no guide but their reason. If anything could arrest this unhealthy excitement, and humble the proud aspirations of an inflated intellect, it would surely be to stand still and "consider Him" who was satisfied to progress slowly and gradually, as the seed that is sown in the earth,—“first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear;” to consider Him “who was satisfied to learn obedience by the things which He suffered;” to be “vexed from His youth up;” to take up meekly His daily cross, and daily “to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself;” to fulfil all righteousness, and in our nature, and for our sakes, to “perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.” Year after year did He, who was the wisdom of God and the power of God, consent to remain amongst His people, as a deaf man that heard not, as one that is dumb, that doth not open his mouth; to keep silence, yea, even from good words, though it was pain and grief to Him; satisfied to withhold the exercise of that miraculous power which would have raised from the bed of sickness, or recalled from the sleep of death the faithful Joseph, the dear guardian of His youth. Year after year did the Saviour consent to fold up the everlasting wings, so full of healing for the sorrows of mankind, in the chrysalis of a despised humanity; to be as a worm and no man, the very scorn of the people, despised as the Nazarene, looked down upon

as the carpenter's son, derided as one who knew not letters, unheeded even by His nearest kinsmen, who could discern no greatness in Him, and who, when He began His ministry, were the last to believe on Him, the first to reproach Him with His previous seclusion and inactivity, tauntingly saying, "If Thou doest these things, shew Thyself to the world." And why was the Saviour satisfied so long thus quietly to wait, thus passively to endure? Surely that in Him first patience might have its perfect work, and perhaps also to shew us how great was that work which required so long, so painful a training. Let us not imagine, then, that the sufferings of the Saviour were compressed into the three and a half years of His public ministry; perhaps these eighteen years might have been to Him the most trying time of His probation on earth. Often might His righteous soul have exclaimed, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" but having yielded up as *man* His own divine will, like one of us, He was content submissively to await the times and the seasons which the Father had put in His own power. Like one of us, He waited to be called, but no sooner did the call come from above, than the Great Captain of our salvation was found as willing actively to suffer as He had been passively to endure. Putting on the breast-plate of righteousness, "clad with zeal as a cloak," He went forth to tread the wine-press alone. Abandoning the home which for thirty years had sheltered Him, He went

forth houseless and friendless, for though the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air their nests, the Son of man had not where to lay His head, and the only habitation the world was found willing to provide for its Saviour was the last home of the just and the unjust, the quiet grave, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MARRIAGE-FEAST.

The mother of Jesus was there.—ST. JOHN ii. 1.

THE genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ is given to us twice in Scripture,—once by St. Matthew, who, writing for the Jews, traces the Saviour's descent from Abraham down to Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom he tells us "was born Jesus, who is called Christ^a;" shewing that the Blessed Virgin, being of the stock of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, and of the house and lineage of David, ful-

^a The genealogy of Joseph was the same as that of Mary, she being his kinswoman. "If it be asked whence the Evangelist had these genealogies, since Scripture is silent on them, it may be answered that authentic genealogical tables were kept by the Jews in the archives of the Temple, which were well known, and which they guarded with particular care, especially those touching the tribe of Levi, on which depended their whole Temple service, sacrifices, and expiations; and those of the tribe of Judah, especially those of the house and lineage of David, that they might know that their Messiah was of the seed of David, according to the promise." It is worthy of remark, that ever since the coming of the Saviour, though not acknowledged by the Jews nationally as their Messiah, they have ceased to preserve these genealogies, so that the Jews do not know at this day who of them are of the tribe of Judah; and if really, as they still expect, their Messiah were to appear, they have no means whatever of knowing him to be of the house of Judah or of the lineage of David.

filled in herself all the prophetic declarations respecting the coming of Him who was "to be called Immanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us." The genealogy of our Lord is given again in St. Luke, who traces the Saviour's descent through Heli, the father of Mary, up to Adam, the common parent of mankind, to shew that He was not only to be the Messiah of the Jew, but also of the Gentile^b; not only to be the King of Israel, but also the "head of the heathen," and the salvation of God "to the ends of the earth." It shewed, moreover, that the seed promised to Abraham was also the seed promised to our first parents in paradise, so that the "Mary of whom Christ was born" represented not only the Virgin "spoken of by the prophet Isaiah," but also "the woman" whose seed was to "bruise the serpent's head." St. Paul very emphatically declares that all the gracious promises of restoration given to the world were centred in the *one* precious seed, for that when God gave the promise to Abraham that "in Isaac his seed should be called," "He said not unto *seeds*, as of *many*, but to thy *seed*, as of *one*, that is *Christ*," for He was to be the one only Saviour, the one only Mediator between God and man; the one only Name under heaven whereby we must be saved; "the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world." This precious seed in the beginning was indeed "the smallest of all seeds," despised and

^b See Appendix, Note A.

rejected of men, but when sown in the earth it sprang up to be the wide-spreading tree, under whose branches the fowls of the air were to seek their refuge, and under whose shadow the weary and heavy-laden were to find their rest. When the Saviour was born, some few were privileged to greet His coming; the shepherds of Galilee, the Eastern Magi, the aged Simeon, the prophetess Anna, and those holy persons who were "waiting for the consolation of Israel," recognised Jesus as this long-promised seed, as the unspeakable gift of God to His people. There was also at the time of His birth a very general expectation, not only amongst the Jews but even in the Gentile world, that some great personage would appear, so that when the wise men enquired for Him who was born King of the Jews, Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. These expectations, however, appeared to have died away, and the wonderful signs which occurred at the Saviour's birth to have been entirely forgotten. He came not in power and great glory, as men expected He would come, and therefore they ceased to believe that He had come at all; and so for thirty years the Son of God lived amongst His people; for thirty years the light of His countenance beamed upon them daily, but like the light of day, it was too common a blessing for man to think about, to understand, or to appreciate. As, though God is recognised in the lightning flash which blinds us, He is rarely perceived in the sun-

beam which gives us light. Even when He walked upon earth, in all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, multitudes heard His gracious words, and saw His mighty deeds, but looking upon Him with the eye of sense alone, they knew Him only "after the flesh," and supposed Him to be nothing more than "the Son of Joseph." It was given but to few to see Him as He is, and to acknowledge Him, with St. Peter, to be not only the Son of man, but also "the Christ, the Son of the living God." All that flesh and blood could do *then* was to reveal the Saviour as "the Son of Joseph," as "the Prophet that should come into the world," or as "one of the prophets." All it can do *now* is to reveal Him as the first-born of creation, the greatest of all created Beings, the wisest of all moralists and philosophers, but it never has and never can reveal Him to man as "the true God and eternal life," or lead us "to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." For the Saviour has Himself declared that to apprehend this great truth man needs a special illumination from above; and He has also told us that while this special illumination is withheld from the presumptuous disputer of this world, "the wise" in their own conceits, "the prudent in their own eyes," it is vouchsafed "to babes," to the meek, to the humble, and to the single-minded; just as the sun concentrates his brightness, and shews forth a perfect image of himself, in the un-

sullied mirror of the lowly dewdrop; while on the proud bosom of the restless and turbulent ocean his rays are scattered, and clouds for ever intervene to break the unity of his glorious presence. It is, therefore, not at all extraordinary that the people of Nazareth, so peculiarly high-minded and self-dependent, should have remained in total ignorance of the divine presence which had been so long growing up amongst them. But when we consider the tenderness and loving-kindness of our gracious Redeemer, it does seem wonderful that when He arose to leave the place He had dwelt in so long, even while considered merely as "the Son of Joseph," none were found among His kinsfolk and acquaintances to cleave to Him; not one among the friends and companions of his youth and manhood to say to Him, "Whither Thou goest I will go, and where Thou lodgest I will lodge; Thy people shall be my people, and Thy God my God." That He should thus have been suffered to depart alone, and to become at once a stranger unto His brethren, even an alien to His mother's children^c, shews us that from the first moment of His leaving His home at Nazareth to the last hour of His agony at Gethsemane, nothing awaited Him from man but coldness, ingratitude, and desertion. And if "sharper than a serpent's tooth" to us is the thanklessness of those on whom we have bestowed our dearest and best affections, what must it have been to Him

^c See Ps. lxix. 8, appointed for Good-Friday.

who was the very soul of tenderness? For though there are some with us who in the pride of stoicism, or in cold and passive endurance, shut themselves up from all human sympathy, as if their sufferings were too deep and too mysterious for any to enter into or to understand, we know that it was not so with our all-gracious Redeemer; for that He sought the loving-kindness of those around Him, and that He earnestly desired their tender consideration in His sorrows is revealed to us by the words of prophecy:—"I looked for some to have pity on Me, but there was no man, neither found I any to comfort Me;" that He sought for human sympathy in the hour of His deepest need, is shewn in His prayer to His best-beloved disciples, "Tarry ye here and watch with Me;" that He painfully felt the weakness which led them to sleep while He suffered, is revealed in that tender reproof which He addressed to them, "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" That their future desertion of Him filled His heart with deep and mournful sadness, is evidenced in those last words of quiet resignation, "Sleep on now, and take your rest," such rest as the self-reproving heart can take, when those they love are gone from them, and the hour passed away in which their watchful affection might have upheld the spirit in heaviness, and ministered to the soul "exceeding sorrowful even unto death." Alas! for the weakness of human nature, which compels even the spirit that is willing to "sleep for sorrow," and the heart

that is true to wrap itself in the cloak of insensibility! But the coldness and ingratitude which had "vexed Him from His youth up," and the treachery and desertion which awaited Him, even from His chosen followers, had no power to shake the Saviour's love to His creatures, or to make Him falter in His purpose of redeeming mercy; for He knew that though His life, all pure and holy as it was, would fail to fix the unstable hearts of His disciples, His death would "draw all men to Him," all at least who were not so hardened by sin as to be insensible to a love infinite as the being of Him who, while we were enemies, gave Himself for us. "Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end," giving us "an example that we should follow His steps," that we too should love to the end, not chilled by coldness, not discouraged by ingratitude, but "hoping even against hope," and trusting that by the blessing of God our death may effect the good which our life may be unable to accomplish, that our words may be remembered and our love appreciated, when offences perhaps of temper or of outward bearing are no longer present to counteract our words, or to cast a shade upon our love; so that we may meet in bliss even those whom we may be destined to leave behind us in sorrow—in sorrow so dark as, without this cheering anticipation, to shut out the hope which can throw a brightness even upon the parting hour, and sustain the spirit when breathing out its last farewell. Not only did our

merciful Redeemer "bear our sicknesses," but He also "carried our griefs," making every one of them His own, knowing every feeling which has power to raise or to depress us: so that, if borne up on high by "joy and peace in believing," we climb up into heaven, "He is there:" if an horrible dread overwhelm us, we "go down to hell," "He is there also:" if going forth from our home solitary wanderers to seek from strangers the love denied to us by our friends, we "take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall His hand lead us, and His right hand shall hold us:" if the clouds of adversity gather so thickly on every side that we say in our hearts "Peradventure the darkness shall cover us," He is there to turn our night into day: when our spirit is in heaviness, He knoweth the way that we take, for there is no one path of human sorrow in which His presence has not gone before us, as there is no one desolate spot upon earth which has not been watered for us by His most precious blood. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us:" this love it was that reconciled Him to leave His throne in heaven and to dwell so long in an earthly home, where, except by the gentle mother who had borne Him, He was uncared for and neglected: this love it was which made Him, "as the Son of Joseph," go forth from that lowly home to tread the weary way that led from Nazareth to Golgotha: this love it was which led Him to the banks

of the river Jordan, there to bow His meek head before the son of Zacharias, and to receive at the hand of His own messenger those healing waters that were to wash away not His own sin (for He *alone* was without sin) but the sins of the whole world. For by thus humbling Himself He was "exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, and to *give* repentance" to the Israel of God.

Immediately after our Lord's baptism we read that He was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. In His baptism our blessed Lord was alone with the minister of God, who saw the heavens opened and the dove descend, and who bore testimony to the awful voice which said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." In His temptation our Lord was alone with the great enemy of mankind; none but the eye of God the Father looked down upon that mysterious conflict, none but the Father could know the harassing nature of that struggle, the bitterness of that trial, which when at an end called for the ministry of angels to strengthen and uphold that human nature in which the trial had been met and the victory achieved. For our blessed Lord consented to be tried as man, and as man to be perfected; "not by being kept out of temptation, but by being victorious in temptation." In the third great act recorded by the Evangelist our blessed Lord was not alone; the scene had changed from the banks of the Jordan and the solitary wilderness to the

crowded gathering and the festive board, and He who came to teach us to rejoice with the innocently glad, as well as to weep with the miserable, was willing to be a guest at the marriage-feast of Cana; by His presence sanctifying the festive solemnity, and rendering this one in particular for ever memorable, by making it the occasion of His first great miracle. It is also at the marriage-feast in Cana that once more the Blessed Virgin is brought before us in Holy Writ, for we are told that the mother of Jesus was there; "was there,"—not it would seem without design, but on the contrary to receive for herself and to transmit to us a most important and valuable lesson. We gather from the Scripture narrative that the marriage festivities seemed likely to be brought to a close from the want of more wine to supply the guests. The mother of our Lord was applied to in this emergency, but being unable herself to remove the difficulty, she immediately refers to her Son. It is possible that when the Saviour finally left His home at Nazareth, He might have made known to the Virgin that henceforth His Heavenly Father's business would be His only business upon earth, and she might have looked forward to His now doing something to astonish and arrest the mind of His people, and to shew forth at last the power that was in Him. She therefore calls His attention to the fact that there was no more wine, and thus seems to appeal to Him to supply the wants of the assembled guests. How is this appeal met

by the Saviour? Does He say to her, as He did afterwards to the other applicants for His bounty, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt?" In performing the miracle does He give her and us to understand that it was done at her solicitation? The very reverse is the fact; for, explain His answer how you will, if words are allowed to have any meaning at all, that meaning must have been to put aside *her* mediation, and distinctly to shew to her and to us that when about His Heavenly Father's business He had nothing to say to her, that there was absolutely nothing in common between Him and her. However her *pretended* votaries may, by handling the word of God deceitfully, attempt to wrest this Scripture to their own destruction, it is quite obvious that the Blessed Virgin herself *perfectly understood* what His answer meant, for in that beautiful spirit of humility and ready acquiescence to the slightest intimation of the divine will, she withdraws herself at once from all further interference, with those significant words addressed to the servants in attendance, "Whatsoever *He* saith unto you *do it*." This is the only exhortation proceeding from the lips of the Virgin which the spirit of inspiration has written for our learning; let these precious words be inscribed upon our hearts, and, like those faithful servants to whom they were addressed, let us in *all* our emergencies ever turn to our only Master, and receive our commands from the Word of the Lord, and whatsoever "*He* telleth us to do" let us, like

them, be ready at once to "do it." The marvellous simplicity of the orders given on this occasion by the Saviour to the servants who surrounded Him, shewed forth His mighty power and their unquestioning obedience; for we are told that "there were set six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece;" Jesus therefore simply takes (as was His wont) what was at hand,—the power being ever in Him, not in the means which He used,—and He desires the servants to fill the waterpots with water, and they fill *to the brim*, thus precluding all possibility of anything being added to the water which they poured in. He then tells them to bear it to the governor of the feast, and they bare it; and thus by the mighty power of God, working, as it pleases Him to work, in co-operation with the obedience of man, the miracle is performed. The good wine, which had indeed been kept until now, was supplied, and the guests were gladdened by this "*beginning* of miracles which Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, which manifested forth His glory," and caused His disciples to believe on Him. "After this He went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples: and they continued there not many days^d." He could not now remain unsought, for His fame spread abroad; and He could no longer be hid. And now miracle after miracle follows in rapid succession;

^d St. John ii. 12.

virtue goes out of Him to give light, and life, and joy to all who approach Him; and thus multitudes follow Him, crowds throng Him, so that from henceforth even His mother and His brethren cannot at all times approach Him; for on one occasion it is recorded that they are obliged "to stand without," desiring to speak with Him; and thinking, perhaps, that they had a right to be nearer to Him than those who were at that moment in His immediate presence, "they sent unto Him calling Him;" and the multitude also that sat about Him said unto Him, "Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren *without* seek for Thee," to draw His attention to their unseemly position, in order that He might go to them, or command a way to be made for them to draw nearer to Him. The Saviour does neither the one nor the other, but, on the contrary, He teaches them and us that "to stand without" was as much the duty of His mother and His brethren after the flesh, as of the poorest and meanest of His creatures by whom He was so densely surrounded; He answers the application that had thus been made to Him, by asking that very remarkable question, "Who is My mother, or who are My brethren?" and while all eyes are upon Him He stretched forth His Almighty hand upon the multitude, as if to draw them still closer to Himself, as if to gather together in one, without distinction, all the poor sheep of His pasture, by the encouraging declaration that as with the Father so with the Son, there was

“no respect of persons,”—for “He looked round about on them which sat about Him, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! for *whosoever* shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and My *mother*.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CROSS AND PASSION.

There stood by the cross of Jesus His mother.—ST. JOHN XIX. 25.

IF we have failed to realize, in its mysterious stillness and apparent inactivity, the thirty years of our Blessed Lord's probationary life upon earth, we shall also fail to realize, in all its wondrous activity and unceasing energy, the three years and a half of His active ministry. It seems to us incredible that in that little space of time One bearing the lineaments of man, and walking the earth as man, should have accomplished so mighty a revolution in the world, should have founded a dominion which can never cease, and established a kingdom which can never pass away.

Our Lord's career, from the moment He left His home at Nazareth until He finished His work upon the cross, is one continued victorious progress over the enemy of mankind; going forth "conquering and to conquer," chaining Satan to His triumphant car. He led captivity captive, loosed everywhere the bands of wickedness, undid the heavy burdens, and let the prisoners go free. While healing the body

He gave light to the sin-sick soul ; none were too low to command His attention, none too high to be left uncared for. The high and the low were equally recognised as His creatures, worthy of His care, and needing His divine assistance. *All* who came were received by Him ; parents pleaded for their children, masters for their servants, friends for their friends, the humane for those who could not plead for themselves ; no intercession was rejected by Him, no one ever pleaded in vain. On the contrary, *their* faith even for others was accepted, and their prayers fulfilled. In the case of His chosen disciples not only was their intercession never repelled, but they were expressly called and empowered to co-operate with Him in the mighty deeds He performed, and to be fellow-workers with Him in His labours of love. When in the wilderness the people wanted bread, as at Cana they wanted wine, His words to His disciples were, " Give *ye* them to eat ; " and it was by graciously accepting, and miraculously blessing, the little all which they had to give, that He through *their* hands fed the assembled multitudes ; for we are expressly told that the baskets of fragments which remained were the fragments of the five barley loaves and two small fishes. Surely this miracle forms a strong contrast to the one at Cana, where our Lord so decidedly repels the co-operation of His blessed mother, who, in consequence, throughout the whole of His ministry, is never again heard to raise her voice in intercession for the wants

or for the sufferings of her fellow-creatures. Indeed, we seem to lose sight of the Virgin entirely; we never hear of her in the house at Bethany, we do not hear of her at the raising of Lazarus, we do not hear of her at the supper given to do Him honour, when His sacred head was anointed for His burial. After the marriage-feast at Cana, and the incident mentioned in our last chapter, no mention whatever is made of the Blessed Virgin, with whom, according to His words, He seems to have had nothing whatever to do until His hour was come, until in our nature, which He had taken from her, He was to die as man for the sin of man, and as man to commit His righteous Spirit into the hands of "His Father and our Father, His God and our God." Then, at the last sad hour, is the mother found once more by the side of her Son; for the Evangelist tells us "there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother." At that fearful hour she must have but too clearly understood, in its sad accomplishment, the prophecy of the aged Simeon; for piercing indeed must have been the sword which now lacerated her inmost soul. Though utterly powerless to avert, helpless even to assuage, the terrible agonies she was doomed to witness, there she stood at the foot of the cross in mute and patient endurance, riveted to the fatal spot, gazing her last at her Son and her Saviour, listening, it may be, for some gracious word to lay up in her heart, and to ponder upon when He is gone from her for ever. For though His

strength is dried up as a potsherd, and His tongue cleaveth to the roof of His mouth, yet still, though brought to the dust of death, the fountain of living waters cannot but continue to flow. Even in the "dust of death" He cannot but speak the gracious words of tender love, of divine compassion, to those who surround Him. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," is the Sufferer's dying prayer for His murderers, ignorant and deluded as they were in their eagerness to quench the light of Israel, to crucify the Prince of Life. "To-day shalt Thou be with Me in paradise," was the Redeemer's last dying promise to one of the transgressors with whom He was numbered. Did she, the poor mourner at the foot of His cross, hear these gracious words, and wish that such a promise had been given to her; that she too might depart at once and be with Him in paradise, and thus escape that to-morrow which in its utter desolation is so full of anguish to the heart of the bereaved? And as the shadow of death becomes deeper and deeper on the Saviour's brow, does she begin to think that He will depart without one look of tender recognition, one word of thoughtful love to her? It is not so, for His last dying look is bent upon His mother, His last dying thought is to provide for her support and consolation. St. John in his Gospel says, "When therefore Jesus saw His mother and the disciple standing by *whom He loved*,"—why is it said the *disciple*, and not the *mother, whom He*

loved? Do we wish to change this sentence? We dare not, however, we must not—for we know that *our* thoughts are ever cleaving to the dust of our earthly affections, whilst His thoughts are higher than the heavens, embracing and guarding the future in His all-foreseeing wisdom, and even so as the Spirit has written it we must be satisfied to read it.—“When, therefore, Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple standing by whom He loved, He said to His mother, Woman, behold thy son! then said He to the disciple, Behold thy mother!” Thus in these few touching words does the Redeemer at once fix the position which the Blessed Virgin is from henceforth to occupy in the heart of His disciple, and in the memory of His Church. “Behold,” not *My* mother but “*thy* mother;” behold one blessed indeed among women, but still one among women, a being of the earth like thyself, claiming not thy adoration, but thy filial tenderness,—not the incense of thy prayers and praises, but the homage of thy best affections, thy reverential love. Behold *thy* mother! cherish her, protect her, comfort her, forsake her not, until having finished her course as she began it, in faith and humility, she enters for ever into the joy of her Lord. That the beloved disciple understood this to be the true nature of the charge thus so simply and so solemnly given to him, is evident from the words which follow, for “from that hour that disciple took her to his own home,” to share with him all he could call his own, the deep poverty of his worldly

substance, the rich treasures of a heart overflowing with tenderness and love. From that hour he took the desolate mourner to his own home, to be to her a son and she to him a mother. And now the sacred record relapses again into silence respecting the mother of our Lord. We are not told whether she remained at the foot of the cross to see "the end." We know not whether she listened to the agonizing cry with which He who was made sin for us met the hiding of His Father's countenance, and endured the "horror of great darkness," the antitype of that which once overwhelmed the father of the faithful*. We are not told whether she heard the loud triumphant cry which followed, when, victorious even in death, the Redeemer yielded up His righteous soul, not in forced surrender, but as a free-will offering for the sins of the whole world. Nothing more is told us in Holy Scripture respecting the Blessed Virgin at the crucifixion, after our Lord had committed her to the care of the beloved disciple. Of the other holy women who attended Him, it is recorded that they remained with Him to the last, they saw Him taken down from the cross; "they beheld the sepulchre, and how His body was laid;" and marking the place, they purposed in their pious hearts to prepare spices and ointments, and to return again to pay the last sad office to the dead, and thus to mark their love and their gratitude, and also, alas! to mark the little hope they had of be-

* Gen. xv. 12.

holding Him again, the little faith they had in the promise which He had left them, that "after three days He would rise again." That Sabbath was a high day, on the which the Saviour, having finished His work upon earth, consented, as the wayfaring man (to whom He is compared by the prophet Jeremiah), to lay Him down and take His rest in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea. Very reverently did the holy women mentioned in Scripture keep this great solemnity, for they returned to their homes, and having prepared the spices and ointments necessary for the mournful ceremony of the morrow, "they rested the Sabbath-day according to the commandment." But as the shadow must flee away at the rising of the sun, so did this high day, this last Jewish Sabbath, pass away, when the "first day of the week," the first day of the new creation, began to dawn,

"And East and West without a breath
Mixt their dim lights like life and death,
To widen into endless day."

On this first endless day of light and joy, on this first Christian Sabbath, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the wife of Cleophas, and other women whose names are not mentioned, hasten to the sepulchre of the Lord on their ministry of duty and of love, and in seeking the dead they find the living. For we are told that the Saviour appeared first of all to Mary Magdalene, afterwards to the other holy women, and then to His disciples. The Roman Catholic

Church, and some individual members also of our own Church, have believed that it was to His blessed mother that the Saviour first appeared after His resurrection, in spite of the declaration of the evangelist St. Mark that "when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils,"—a declaration full of deep and touching interest; for it is in perfect harmony with the tender consideration the Redeemer ever shewed for His weak and suffering creatures, that He should first have appeared to her who had once been so fast bound in misery and iron, the wretched victim of the sevenfold power of the evil one, and who, it is natural to suppose, was overwhelmed, not merely, like the other holy women, with sorrow for the loss of her beloved Master, but also with a horrible dread lest, being forsaken by her great Deliverer, she might again become a prey to the fearful enemy of her soul. The despair of the Magdalene at the empty sepulchre of her Lord suggests reflections such as these, for it seems to have rendered her completely insensible to the wondrous presence of the angels, and to have so entirely blinded her eyes with tears, and bewildered her mind with sorrow, that she cannot even recognise her risen Lord, though He is standing beside her. She accosts Him as if He were a stranger, and incoherently speaks to Him as to one whose compassion may be moved to help her to find the lifeless body she is seeking, that she

may take it and carry it away with her, *how* or *whither* she cannot tell; for in truth, at that sad moment she seems incapable of knowing or feeling anything but His loss and her wretchedness. Most urgently then did this poor sufferer need the immediate presence of the Great Physician of her soul to call her by her name^b, and bring her to herself.

In reading the touching narrative of St. John the heart bears witness to the truth of the gracious declaration, that to Mary Magdalene Jesus first appeared after His resurrection; nor is it necessary to contradict this impressive Scriptural fact in order to do honour to the Blessed Virgin; for if we may be permitted to conjecture, where Scripture is silent, why may we not suppose that to the faith of the Virgin was granted that higher blessedness which our Lord intimated to St. Thomas would be the portion of those who saw not and yet believed? Our Lord assured His sorrowing disciples before He went away, that He would not leave them comfortless, that He would send the Comforter in some new and wondrous way to support and strengthen them. Why, then, may we not suppose that the eternal Spirit began His divine mission of love and consolation in the heart of the bereaved mother of our Lord, there to speak peace

^b It may be remarked that the only two individuals whose names were uttered by our Lord on the morning of His resurrection are those of Mary Magdalene and of the deeply repenting Peter.

to her troubled spirit, and to say unto her soul, "Weep not," "thy Son liveth;" "Be not dismayed, for He is thy God," able to lay down His life, able to take it up again; able to pluck from death its sting, and from the grave its victory. This supposition, which, while it offers no contradiction to the Word of God, and is in perfect harmony with His merciful consideration for all His creatures, accounts at once for no mention having been made of the Virgin with the other holy women at the tomb of our Lord; for whilst they are seeking with tearful eyes and sorrowing hearts "the living among the dead," looking into the cold and empty sepulchre, intent only on finding the sacred but lifeless body of their beloved Master, she, the blessed mother of our Lord, might in heart have risen with her Son, in spirit have rejoiced, as it had never before been given her to rejoice, in "God her Saviour." More blessed, indeed, might she have been in this full assurance of faith, than those who saw and believed: for of them some "believed not for joy," whilst others doubted, and all were filled with wondering and perplexity. For the eye of sense is weak and wavering, prone to be dazzled and blinded even by that light in which alone it can see light, whilst the eye of faith is strong and steadfast, and believes without a fear, without a doubt.

Once more, and once only, is the mother of our Lord brought before us in Holy Scripture. St. Luke, in the Acts, when telling us of the disciples and

holy women who were gathered together in prayer in the upper room which they had thus consecrated by their piety, tells us also that "the mother of Jesus was there." This is the last mention of the Blessed Virgin in the Book of God, and those who truly revere her memory would not have it otherwise; they would not seek by fanciful legends and contradictory traditions to disturb the salutary influence which this last mention of her in Holy Writ is calculated to produce. Turning away with a feeling of contempt and distaste from images unworthy of her, they love to dwell upon her in their minds as she is represented in the Word of God; to picture her, not arrayed in the gaudy frivolities of this vain world, but clothed to the very last in the beauteous robe of true Christian humility, making one with the blessed company of the faithful on earth, mingling her voice with theirs, devoutly joining with them in that one levelling act which makes us all equal in the sight of God, by bringing all as suppliants before the throne of grace; for no place will be found for the pride of earthly distinctions, of spiritual prerogatives, there, where every knee is bent, and every heart is poured out in earnest and fervent prayer.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.

1 ST. PETER iv. 11.

THERE are but too many in our day who forget that it is only by taking to themselves the *whole* armour of God that they can hope to repel the fiery darts of the wicked one; that it is only when they have “done all,” that is, guarded every avenue through which the enemy might get an advantage over them, that they may hope to stand in the evil day of false doctrine, heresy, and schism. Some are ready to cover themselves with the shield of faith, who neglect to put on the breastplate of righteousness, and thus, by following a doctrine not according to godliness, make shipwreck of their souls. Some more practical spirits choose to consider the breastplate of righteousness an all-sufficient defence; whilst others presumptuously place upon their heads the helmet of salvation, without a thought that it belongs only to those who have their feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace. “The sword of the Spirit,” that two-edged sword, “which

is the Word of God," given to us in the law and the testimony of Jesus, is never *thoroughly* held by these one-sided professors, so that at the first violent assault of the enemy it escapes from their feeble grasp; and as it is the only weapon allowed to the Christian combatant, they are thus left unarmed in the power of the adversary. Convinced of the inutility of fighting the enemy with mere fragmentary portions of the sacred armory, with mere isolated texts taken here and there, which can generally be met by other passages taken in the same loose and unsatisfactory manner, it has been the object of the writer of the preceding pages to try the innovating spirit of the age by the only test which God has given us,—“the law and the testimony” of Jesus; to search the holy record of Scripture thoroughly and diligently, and to record faithfully *all* that could be gathered respecting the Blessed Virgin, the mother of our Lord. Beginning with the Old Testament, it has been shewn that though to be called by name is an individual mark of honour given by God to His most distinguished saints, yet to the Blessed Virgin this distinction was never once given in the whole book of prophecy. Indeed, this remarkable silence as to the name of the mother of the Messiah was seized upon by the unbelieving Jews as one of their reasons for rejecting the Saviour; for they said, “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” “*Is not his mother called Mary?*” “Howbeit we know this man, whence he is, but when Christ cometh, no man

knoweth whence *He* is ;” and not only in the book of prophecy, but also by the Redeemer Himself, is the Blessed Virgin never called by name. “Woman” is the only designation given to her by the prophets, by her divine Son, and by the Apostle Paul. Not in honour, and assuredly not in *dishonour*, but, as it would seem, to carry out and to harmonize with the grand design everywhere apparent in Scripture, of marking *the universality* of God’s unspeakable gift to the world by making the Blessed Virgin the representative of our race, and shewing that it was not to her *as an individual*, but that it was “to *us*” a Child was born,—“to *us*” a Son was given. In reading the Word of God, it is also impossible not to observe how frequently the title “holy” is used by the inspired writers. It is continually applied to God’s chosen people, and also to the saints of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New. “The holy men of old,” “the holy prophets,” “the holy apostles,” are *Scriptural* expressions, and therefore perfectly unexceptionable, and this makes it the more remarkable that the title holy has never once been given in Scripture to the mother of our Lord, and yet to her it is most peculiarly applicable when taken in the sense in which it is applied generally to the saints of God. Here again do we recognise the all-foreseeing wisdom of God, thus guarding His Word from affording the slightest encouragement to those who have ever sought to misapply this title, by giving it in its *highest* sense to the meek and

lowly handmaiden of the Lord. Most presumptuously have they done so, for as in that highest sense there is but "One good, that is God," so "there is none holy as the Lord." "The Holy One" is *His* name, the name peculiarly belonging to Him "who inhabiteth eternity;" so is it taking that sacred name in vain to apply it even to the most perfect of created beings. Exactly the same observation may also be made with respect to that other title by which the Church of Rome continually designates the Blessed Virgin, "The mother of God." This title, like holy, is never *once* given to her in Scripture, though like holy, when *rightly understood*, it most truly belongs to her; for when the Son of God was made man, the Blessed Virgin thus became mother of "the Christ," "both God and Man." But it must never be forgotten that she remained the creature of God even when she became mother of the Christ, and that He remained the Lord of Mary even when He so humbled Himself as to become her Son. For in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and "the Word was God," all things were made by Him, and so He was the Lord and Maker of David, and consequently the Lord and Maker of Mary. How, then, was He her Son? This question is put to us by our Lord Himself, and by putting it He teaches us to meditate upon that stupendous and mysterious act of divine condescension and love, by which, in taking into His own divine nature our

frail humanity, He became our friend and our Brother, touched with a sense of all human infirmity, without ever ceasing to be the "only wise God our Saviour," "whose goings forth have been from everlasting." Our Lord speaking to the Scribes and Pharisees said unto them, "How say they that Christ is David's Son? And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool. David therefore calleth Him Lord, how is He then his Son^a?" Had the men to whom our Lord put this important question really known the Law and the Prophets, as they prided themselves upon doing, they would have found no difficulty in answering it, for their Scriptures everywhere spoke to them of this twofold nature which their great Messiah was to bear; and so instead of ignorantly crucifying the Nazarene because He being Man made Himself God, they would have believed in Him because He being God had made Himself man; they would have seen a true type of Him not in the presumptuous tower seeking to raise itself from earth to heaven, but in the celestial ladder let down from heaven to earth, at the foot of which slept their lonely patriarch who saw in beatific vision Him "that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven." They would have seen in Him not merely the lowly stem of Jessé, the branch and offspring of David, but the "root of

* St. Luke xx.

David," the root from which David sprung, the Lord and Maker of all things; they would have seen in Him not merely "the Man of sorrows," but "the Man who is My fellow, saith the Lord of hosts;" they would have seen in Him not merely the carpenter's son whose "mother was called Mary," but also the "King of Peace," the true Melchisedec, "without father" (as touching His manhood), "without mother" (as touching His God-head^b); "without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." It must also be remarked, that though the Saviour was the Son of David only through His being born of the Blessed Virgin, yet is He never in the Gospel once invoked as the Son of Mary; "O *Son of David* have mercy on us," is the only form of invocation made to His humanity which has been retained in our Liturgy, because it is the only one which has been sanctioned by the authority of Holy Scripture.

With respect to the Blessed Virgin it is quite evident that she was never considered by her own people as exempted from the ordinary condition of humanity before the Annunciation of the angel Gabriel. Had the birth of the mother been as miraculous as that of her divine Son, surely some of her kinsfolk must have known of it; Elisabeth, for instance, being so much older than the Virgin, and also her cousin, must have been aware of such a marvellous occurrence, had it really taken place;

^b Archbishop Usher.

not the slightest intimation, however, of such knowledge appears in her answer to Mary's salutation, in which she pronounces the Virgin to be blessed because she was chosen to be the mother of her Lord; "blessed," because "she believed;" but she makes no mention whatever of the previous exceeding blessedness of having been created by God more perfect than the angels, "whom He charges with folly," more exalted than the heavens, which are "not clean in His sight." As Scripture has particularly recorded the wonderful births of Isaac, of Samson, and of St. John the Baptist, it would surely have also recorded the much more wonderful birth of the Blessed Virgin; for be it remembered that as men do not light a candle to put it under a bushel, but to set it on a candlestick, to give light "unto *all* that are in the house^c," so when God interferes miraculously, it is not that His wondrous works should be kept secret, or obscurely and dubiously intimated to His people, but, on the contrary, that in them they should see and acknowledge His almighty power, signs and wonders being given not to perplex but to confirm the word of God, and to "stablish, strengthen, settle" the faith of His people. It has been shewn, from the history of our Lord, that when the Blessed Virgin is brought before us in her *individual* character she has never been represented to us as one to whom prayer or praise is due, or as one to whom we have been re-

^c St. Matt. v. 15.

ferred for protection in earthly difficulties, or for assistance in our spiritual conflicts; on the contrary, she is ever brought before us as one of ourselves, reproved when in error, pitied when in sorrow, and provided for when in bereavement. In the Jewish Church we read of a Deborah, who was permitted to rule over the "people of God," and by her earnest zeal and lofty courage to lead them on to triumph gloriously over the enemies of their country. In the Christian Church we read of a Priscilla who was permitted, by expounding the word of God more perfectly to the early converts, to strengthen their hearts, and to help them on to a still more glorious triumph over the enemy of their immortal spirits. But where do we read that any such commission was ever delegated to the Virgin mother? Nowhere is she ever given authority to preach or to teach, to loose or to bind. While the twelve apostles and seventy disciples were sent forth to work with their Master in His labour of love, never did He permit His blessed mother to co-operate with Him when about His Father's business, in the great work of man's salvation. No miracle was ever performed by her during our Lord's ministry, or after His resurrection. No mention whatever has been made of her in St. Peter's or in any one of the apostolic writings. The beloved disciple very long outlived the mother of our Lord; if, therefore, the celestial doors had been once more set open, and the everlasting gates lifted up to receive the queen of heaven, and the pro-

tectress of the earth ; if her miraculous assumption into heaven had been really an *apostolic* fact, the Apostle must have known it, and it would surely have been as faithfully recorded in the Gospel as the assumption of Elijah was recorded in the Prophets. For it seems incredible that while to this favoured disciple all things were revealed, "to the last syllable of recorded time," even to the fleeing away of the earth and the heaven before the great white throne and "the face of Him who sat on it," the glories of Mary, the exaltation of her in whom He must have felt so deep, so filial an interest, should have made no part of the heavenly vision vouchsafed to the enraptured gaze of the man like Daniel so greatly beloved. It has indeed been affirmed, by members of the Roman Catholic Church, that the woman seen in the Apocalypse is a representation of the Virgin mother. If this be so, it is a representation full of wonderful instruction to them and to us ; for how is this woman represented ? Not as clothed in her own holiness, but as clothed with the Sun of Righteousness, as covering herself with His vesture of light, as shining forth in the radiance of His glory. What is it that she wears upon her head ? It is the "twelve stars"—the true apostolic doctrine—these are the precious stones^d which make up the jewels of her crown ; these are the only ornaments which encircle her brow ; as if to testify that they "are the

^d "They shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land." Zechariah ix. 16.

lights of the world," and that by them alone are we to be guided in the ways of pleasantness, and in the paths of peace. What, too, does this woman put under her feet? It is the moon, which, cold and dark in herself, is the fit emblem of all those specious reasonings and vain traditions, which being contrary to the word of God, have "no light in them."

If, therefore, the Blessed Virgin was typified by this image, she is only represented as all God's servants may be represented hereafter who clothe themselves in the righteousness of Him who hath called us to eternal glory. It is quite evident, however, that this beautiful symbol does not represent the Blessed Virgin *individually*, but the Christian Church *collectively*; for it is very remarkable that when the infant Church sprung into existence after its baptism of fire on the day of Pentecost, St. Peter anticipates this wondrous vision, and speaks the very language of the Apocalypse, representing the Saviour once more as the "holy child Jesus," suffering in the weakness of His infant Church, describing the evil powers as gathered together to persecute Him again in the persecution of His people, and beseeching the Lord to behold their threatenings, "and to stretch forth His hand to heal," that His servants might with all boldness speak the word, and that signs and wonders might be done by the name of His holy child Jesus, who, "caught up unto God and to His throne," had left the "woman," representing His holy apostolic Church,

to flee into the wilderness, there to be tried by temptations, persecuted "by the dragon," the great enemy of souls, helped by the earth, compassed about with afflictions, supported by the everlasting wings, and in *all* her weakness made strong by that power against which the gates of hell are never to prevail. This apocalyptic symbol of the sorrows of the Church and the joy that should follow, is applied by our Lord to His disciples when preparing their minds for the calamities which were coming upon them, and the sufferings they would have to endure in bearing His name to the world^e, sufferings grievous indeed for the moment, but light when compared with that fulness of spiritual joy which should be revealed in them. St. Paul also appropriates this symbolical image to himself, in describing his manifold perils, his abundant labours in bringing the souls of his brethren to the faith of his beloved Master^f. This symbolical image is likewise very frequently used by the Prophets in the Old Testament; Isaiah pathetically laments that the daughter of His people, the Church of Judah, in spite of all her sorrows and all her pangs, had wrought no deliverance in the earth^g. This apocalyptic vision of the sufferings of the Church when left by its Lord is again most wonderfully and beautifully anticipated in the Song of Solomon, for there the bride, the Church of Christ, is described as having scarcely awoke from her sleep and opened her heart to re-

^e St. John xvi. 21.^f Gal. iv. 19.^g Isa. xxvi. 17, 18.

ceive her Lord and her God when He is parted from her. He had "withdrawn Himself, and was gone," leaving her to struggle with the fierce enmity of the world. She "is smitten," she "is wounded," her "veil is taken from her," but she counts it all joy to suffer shame and persecution for His Name's sake; no threatening can silence her from proclaiming His beloved Name, and though deep calleth to deep, and all His waves and storms go over her soul, yet "many waters cannot quench love," nor can they extinguish the "vehement flame of jealousy" for the honour of the Lord of Hosts, which burns like coals of fire in her devoted bosom; triumphant at last over her trials, she is again represented as "coming up from the wilderness," her soul hanging upon Him whose almighty arm alone has been her support; and "as the hart desireth the water brooks," so is her soul athirst for the presence of the living God, so does she implore Him to hear her cry from the beautiful gardens of paradise, "from heaven His dwelling place," and to hasten His return, animated as she is by the same earnest longing for His appearance which leads the Psalmist to exclaim "Make no long tarrying, O my God;" which makes the Spirit and the Bride in the Apocalypse say "Come," and the beloved disciple reiterate "Even so come Lord Jesus." All through Holy Scripture the Church, whether Jewish or Christian, is continually represented under the symbol of a woman, a virgin, a bride, or a wife, and

the union between Almighty God and His people under that of a marriage. "Turn, backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you;" "Thy Maker is thy Husband and thy Redeemer;" therefore is the Church called upon to be faithful, and if forgetting her privileges and her duties, she joins the worship of the creature to the worship of her only Lord and Master, and bows down before the image "which the workman hath made," she is given up to the spoilers bitterly to lament that of all her lovers she has chosen for herself there is not one that can help her in the day of her calamity: "Though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rendest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; thy lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life^h." An exile from her home, she is represented in her captivity as hanging her harp upon the willows, there piteously to make its moan to the passing winds, for how can she, "the tempest-tossed and afflicted," sing the Lord's song in a strange land? "her joy is turned into mourning," tears run down her cheeks, "the crown has fallen from her head," and "she being desolate doth sit on the ground." It must be remarked that under whatever emblem the Church is spoken of in Scripture, its unity is always preserved. It is the one kingdom of which Christ is the King, the one body of which He is the Head, the one building of which He is the chief corner-stone, the

^h Jer. iv. 30.

one fold of which He is the Shepherd, the one Bride, the "only one," "the choice one of her mother," of which He is the Bridegroom. To apply, therefore, literally to the Virgin, as the Romanists have done, language which is so unmistakably symbolical of the Church, is to sacrifice to their own particular purpose the truth, sublimity, and consistency of the word of God. When the mother of our Lord is spoken of in Scripture as the woman and as a virgin, no figure of speech is intended, she is really what she is said to be: but when these terms are used symbolically of the Church, in the Psalms, in the Prophets, the Song of Solomon, or the Apocalypse, they can admit of no individual application; nor can they be said to belong to the Blessed Virgin in any other way, than by joining her to that blessed company of the faithful which is ever declared to be "one in the Lord," and which, in its perfect unity, was once completely represented in the upper chamber at Jerusalem; for the mother of Jesus was there with the other holy women, with the apostles and disciples, from the highest to the lowest; all with one accord were gathered together in the one place, breathing the same prayer, animated by the same hope, filled with the same desire, perfectly knit together into that one Body of which Christ alone is the Head. To keep his beloved flock faithful to this suffering but glorious Church, so beautifully brought before him in the Apocalyptic vision; to make them know Christ and His resur-

rection ; to remind them that " the Son of God had come," and that God had given them an understanding that they might know Him who is true, and be in Him that is true, "*even in His Son Jesus Christ ;*" to impress upon their hearts and minds that " this (Jesus) is the true God, and eternal life,"— these are the great, the vital subjects upon which the aged Apostle delighted to dwell. It is with the unqualified assertion of the Deity of the Saviour that St. John concludes his general epistle to the Church of the faithful ; but after having pointed out to them " the true God and eternal life," a vision of coming apostasy seems to rise up before the prophetic eye of the beloved disciple, obscuring with its dark shadow the true light, upon which he ever laboured to fix the adoring gaze of his people ; drawing forth from him a final and earnest charge to be watchful, in those last words of tender and solemn admonition, " Little children, keep yourselves from idols." No doubt it was the fear of this coming apostasy which kept the Apostle from mentioning even the name of her so solemnly committed to his care. But it may now be asked, was it for her sake or for ours only that the blessed mother of our Lord was never permitted to share in the miraculous powers, and the spiritual gifts granted to the apostles, or to receive the homage of those who surrounded her? One sentence uttered by our Lord seems to reveal to us that it was not merely for our sake but for her own sake also that His blessed mother was thus kept back

from "the honour which cometh from man," in order that she might more surely attain to the honour which alone is worthy of an immortal spirit, the honour which cometh from God.

St. Luke in his Gospel records that a woman, most likely a mother in Israel, having listened with delight to the "gracious words which fell from the lips" of Him who "spake as never man spake," enthusiastically exclaims, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked;" to which the Saviour solemnly replies, "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." Let us pause and consider the important truth conveyed to us in these words, for they could only mean that however great the blessedness might be of having borne the Saviour to the world, a still greater blessedness, even the blessedness of everlasting life, would be the certain portion of those who heard God's word and kept it, for that against them all the shafts of the enemy would be spent in vain. They who heard His word, and followed Him, were the sheep of His pasture; they were safe in His fold, for none could pluck them out of His almighty hand; whereas the blessedness of having borne Him to the world was but an outward distinction, which, like all outward distinctions, brought with it no immunity from sin, no *certainly* of salvation. To be chosen as the mother of the Christ, the long-promised Messiah, was a high and glorious privilege. It could, however, be given but

to one ; and He who has no respect of persons, and who has appointed the highest places for the humblest spirits, regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden, and on account of that lowliness exalted her to be "Blessed among women," as none other had ever been before, as none other can ever be again. Holy Scripture bears testimony to the greatness of the peril ever attending such marvellous elevations above the common lot of humanity, and shews that the higher we are lifted up the greater is our danger of falling. Full well did the evil one know that those exalted spirits, whom no lower solicitations could move from their integrity, might yet be tempted to a fall by spiritual presumption ; and thus when mysteriously permitted to prove the strength of the second Adam, as he had proved the weakness of the first, he lifted Him on high, and "set Him on the pinnacle of the Temple," above all earthly powers, dominions, and principalities, hoping from that mighty elevation to cast Him down, by tempting Him to do His own will, and to seek His own glory, instead of doing the will and seeking the glory of His heavenly Father ; and by a temptation, afterwards renewed in the person of St. Peter, Satan might have solicited the Man of Sorrows to spare Himself, and to put aside the cup which His heavenly Father had given Him, and to summon to His rescue those legions of angels appointed to bear Him up, "lest He should dash His foot against a stone ;" thus alluring Him to seize the crown before He had

endured the cross, and to leave the sinner without a hope and the world without a Saviour. Little is told us of His sufferings in the Wilderness, but we know that setting the Redeemer on the pinnacle of the Temple must have implied some great spiritual temptation, which savoured the things that be of men, not the things that be of God. We are told of the agony and bloody sweat at Gethsemane, but we are not told of the agony of this most real temptation: all we know is that it was willingly met, patiently endured, and triumphantly overcome; and that when ended, the pitying angels, as at Gethsemane, ministered to the sufferings of the Son of Man. But it was the Holy One of God alone who could venture thus to sound the depths of Satan, and dare him to so terrible a conflict, because He alone could feel secure that the victory would be His. In His spotless humanity, He stood erect while the shafts of the enemy fell harmless at His feet. It had not been so, however, with the once glorious spirits, "which kept not their first estate." It had not been so with the noblest of living souls, pronounced by his Maker to be "very good." *Both* had been cast down by spiritual presumption, the first from the pinnacle of heavenly glory, the last from the pinnacle of earthly supremacy. Who, then, could hope to stand when these had fallen? and what security had the Blessed Virgin herself that such a fall might not be hers? None, assuredly, but in preserving in her elevation the humility which

had exalted her ; none but by remembering that no other way of salvation was opened to her but the way of faith and obedience—that by no other means could she attain to that crown of glory “ eternal in the heavens,” but by walking in all lowliness and meekness, worthy of her high vocation. For had she once forgotten the holiness of Him who had magnified her—had she exalted herself, instead of rejoicing in her God and her Saviour, then indeed would His words have been verified, for more blessed than she who bore Him would have been the meanest of those faithful servants who had heard the Word of God and kept it.

Surely, then, we can see that it was not only for our sakes, but also for her own security, that the Blessed Mother of our Lord was ever withdrawn by the Redeemer from all human adulation, and covered with the shadow of His almighty wing. To the Blessed Mother was extended the same all-gracious consideration for human infirmity which sent a thorn in the flesh and a sharp remembrancer to His devoted apostle, lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations vouchsafed to him, and lest, while preaching to others, he himself should become a cast-away. Through the tender mercy of her God, the Blessed Virgin was thus kept by the power of His grace unto salvation ; for from first to last we behold in her the handmaid of the Lord, ever acknowledging the supremacy of Him whose she was, and whom she served, and in all her actions repeat-

ing her own beautiful words of humble obedience and ready acquiescence—"Be it unto me according to Thy word." But though the wondrous elevation to which the Mother of our Lord had been raised proved no peril to her own soul, unhappily it very quickly proved a peril to ours, and became to the Church of Christ "an occasion of falling:" for scarcely had the holy apostles been gathered to their rest, when the faith which they had once so earnestly delivered to the saints was overrun with the grossest corruptions, while men slept, and the enemy, who never slumbers, industriously laboured, and the tares sprang up in such abundance that they well-nigh choked the good seed of the Word of God. False traditions, false doctrines, were so closely blended with the true, that it seemed impossible to root up the one without plucking up the other also; and thus the mischief progressed till at last the Saviour, with His divine requirements, became too high and holy for the debased condition of the human mind.

An escape was sought from the pure teaching of Him who demanded of His followers a righteousness which should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, and who, in healing their souls, required of them that they should "go and sin no more." Men found this refuge in the worship of the Virgin; for to their imagination she appeared able to obtain for them all they cared to have,—deliverance *in* their sins, not *from* their sins,—salvation without

holiness, mercy without judgment; and so completely did these false and delusive imaginations quench the Spirit in the hearts of those who had once in baptism been signed with the sign of the cross, that it actually led them to the awful impiety of blotting out the name of the Holy Ghost from the eternal Trinity, and substituting in its stead the name of the Blessed Virgin¹. They bowed down and worshipped the creature, instead of the Lord and Giver of life.

The Western Church took to itself the credit of having put down this fearful heresy by restoring the Holy Ghost to the Blessed Trinity, and by declaring that the Mother of our Lord was henceforth to be *honoured*, but not to be *worshipped* as one in the eternal Godhead. Had this reformation been carried out with the uncompromising zeal and the single-minded piety of a Hezekiah, then indeed might that Church whose "faith was once spoken of through the whole world," have been still the home of the true Christian; "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," might still have joined together the blessed company of true believers "in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life." This reformation, however, was too superficial to endure; the seeds of the evil remained, and though the unity of the Holy Trinity has never since been infringed, yet as the images of the Blessed Virgin were always retained in the Church of Rome, men,

¹ See Introduction to Sale's Translation of the Koran.

prone ever to walk by sight and not by faith, very quickly relapsed into the worship of the creature, and the forgetfulness of the Creator ; and now in the nineteenth century—this vaunted century of intellectual knowledge and mental progress—this evil, instead of diminishing, is actually progressing ; for it is the boast of the Church of Rome, that never was the Blessed Virgin so universally and so devoutly *worshipped*, her power so fully recognised by the faithful, as at this present time.

Holy Scripture has said that there is *one* Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus : the Church of Rome so far agrees with Scripture as to consider that there is indeed one Mediator—not, however, the Lord Jesus Christ, but His Blessed Mother ; for everything now is publicly referred to her powerful intercession. It is she who moves the hearts of kings and princes ; it is she who protects the city ; it is she who delivers from “ the arrow that flieth by day,” and from “ the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the sickness that destroyeth in the noon-day ;” it is she who covers the head in the day of battle, and it is to her that the victory is due : “ some put their trust in chariots, and some in horses,” but it is in her name only that invocation is made^k ! It is also considered to be a subject of rejoicing, that sinners so hardened in iniquity as to have “ no fear of *God* before their eyes,” men so destitute of feeling as to reject a *Saviour’s* love, and

^k See extract from Père Lavigne’s Sermon, in Appendix.

to look with apathy upon the cross of the Crucified, are yet to be won over to the worship of the Virgin, to wear her badge, and to enrol themselves as her soldiers and servants; and there are those who scruple not to proclaim the worship of the Blessed Virgin more attractive than that of her Son, more full of love and tenderness than the worship of Him who poured out His soul unto death for us miserable sinners.

No authoritative voice is raised amongst them to dispel this awful delusion, not one is there animated with the spirit of the Apostle Paul, when, in sorrow and indignation, he asked of those who sought unduly to exalt him above his beloved Master, "Was Paul crucified for you? were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" If, indeed, the Blessed Virgin could, as her votaries vainly imagine, descend from the abodes of the "spirits of the just made perfect," how earnestly and how solemnly would her voice be raised to exhort her deluded worshippers to turn from these lying vanities to serve the living God! For if nothing can be more deeply painful to a loyal subject even on our poor earth, than to receive in his own person the homage due to his sovereign, what must it be to a spirit released from the thralldom of the flesh, one for whom all the delusions of earthly ambition and worldly adulation have passed away "as a dream when one awaketh,"—what must it be to such a one to see the worship due to her Sovereign given to herself? To the blessed angels,

and to the spirits of the just, who no longer see as through a glass darkly, but behold face to face the unspeakable glory of the Omnipotent, no sin can appear so terrible, no folly so monstrous, as that involved in investing the creature with the attributes of the Creator ; for though “measuring ourselves by ourselves,” there are degrees of beatitude in heaven, “one star differing from another in glory,” yet is there “a glory of the sun,” an all-transcending light, which none may dare approach unto ; the star exceeding all others in glory, the nearest to the great source from “which in its golden urn it draws its light,” is as far from being *the* sun itself as the most distant luminary in the starry sphere. Most truly do “the heavens declare the glory of God,” and never more truly and loudly than when they proclaim the distance—a distance no human mind can realize—which severs the great source of day from the planets which gild the night ; and “if the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead,” so they are without excuse who liken even the most perfect of created beings to Him their Almighty Creator.

This most awful consideration would be sufficient of itself to deter us from addressing in prayer, or from bowing the knee in adoration even at the sacred name of Jesus, unless we could say with St. Peter, “we believe and *are sure* that Thou

art the Christ, the Son of the living God ;” unless, from the very bottom of our hearts, we could say with St. Thomas, “ My Lord and *my God*.” “ God has made us for Himself,” and graciously accommodating His language to our weakness, He has told us that He is “ a jealous God,” to shew us that the slightest approach to, or appearance of, idolatry is hateful in His sight. He is jealous, too, for our good, lest we should ignorantly cry to those who cannot hear, or trust in those who cannot save.

The heart which has not been perverted in its early years has an intuitive feeling that prayer, “ The breath of God returning to its birth,” the most solemn act of the regenerated Spirit admitted once more to hold communion as in paradise with its reconciled Father, ought never to be offered but to Him who alone is Omnipresent to hear our petitions, Omniscient to know what is good for us, and Omnipotent to grant it. There is an intuitive feeling that—

“ We dare not from His garland pluck a flower,
To make a posy for inferior power¹. ”

This awful dread of praying to any Being that is not God has kept many a one from leaving our Church, who otherwise might have been tempted to seek after greater spirituality in the Romish communion. But lips that, like Daniel’s, have never from their infancy breathed a prayer but to the God of heaven, cannot readily be brought to utter the earnest

¹ George Herbert.

and devout supplications addressed to the Virgin by the members of the Church of Rome. Even when those whose affections have been already withdrawn from the Church of their baptism seek to blind themselves to the true nature of the worship they are called upon to offer to the Blessed Mother of our Lord; when, dishonestly tampering with their sounder convictions, they try by mental reservations to do away in their own case with the sin of which their conscience is afraid; when they try to fall down in a *qualified* adoration before the shrine of a being human as themselves, they are still arrested by a voice speaking to their inmost soul, and saying, "See thou do it not,—worship God." Unhappy is it for those who, in spite of the merciful interposition of the angel with the drawn sword of the Spirit, the revealed Word of God, persevere in this unlawful desire of their hearts, until at last, for their punishment, they are permitted to go over to the enemy, and to delude themselves with the idea that it is their Master's voice which is calling them from their duty, that it is God's own Spirit which is sanctioning their apostacy.

It is true that other idolatries besides spiritual idolatry sever us from God, and interpose a cloud through which our prayer cannot pass, but none so radically, none so hopelessly, as this. It is true that we are all prone to cling too eagerly and fondly to our riches, to our talents, to our pleasures,

to the dear objects of our earthly affections—and these, alas! we to a certain extent do make our idols—but we never *bow* down and *worship* them, we never *pray* to them, we never imagine that *they* can save us from danger here or from punishment hereafter. They rob God of our heart, but never of His holy attributes; He is still exclusively the Lord our God, and there is hope even for us. For often, in compassion to our weakness, He blows upon our gourd and withers it, He gives wings to our riches and they flee away, He takes from us at a stroke the desire of our eyes, and then He brings us back to Himself to feel that there is no true rest for the soul until it finds its rest in Him. But *spiritual* idolatry cannot thus be expelled by chastisements or bereavements: “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more; the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.” Troubles which are good for us in other cases will here but increase our condemnation, by making us multiply our prayers and offerings, and in the blindness of our hearts draw closer and closer to the sin from which they are sent to sever us.

And as with individuals, so it is with nations: other sins, besides the sin of spiritual idolatry, may cause a nation to be rejected by God, but none so hopelessly, none so radically. The Jewish nation is a striking proof of this; for sinful as they were, full of pride, malice, covetousness, cruelty, and hypocrisy, still we have reason to thank God that they had not

added to this fearful catalogue the crowning sin of spiritual idolatry. We may be thankful that when the Saviour came, no idol was found in Jerusalem, no high place to offend the Majesty of the Eternal. Their temple, though polluted by the covetous practices of the wicked, was still His house of prayer, it was still exclusively the temple of the living God ; and thus it became more glorious than the temple of Solomon, for it was illuminated by Him who was the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of the invisible God, the only image before whom every knee may bow and every heart may worship. We may be thankful that, when our Lord came, the book of the law had not been buried in the secret chambers, as in the days which preceded the reign of Josiah, and that no Jehoiakim had violently seized from the hands of the priest the sacred roll full of the words of the Lord, to prevent its being read in the ears of the people.

The Scriptures were at the time of our Lord's advent *regularly* and *thoroughly* read in all the cities of Judæa, and to this do we owe, that when our Lord entered the synagogue at Nazareth, He received the sacred roll, and opened it on the *portion appointed for the day*, and became Himself its gracious expositor, by declaring the wonderful words of the Prophet Isaiah that day fulfilled in their ears^m. Thus, amidst all the sins of Judah, the knowledge of God's Word was still kept alive in the hearts of

^m See note A. at the end of the volume.

the faithful; and those who *really* believed in Moses and the prophets were very quickly attracted to Him of whom they wrote. For to the Jews do we owe not only "the goodly fellowship of the prophets," but also "the glorious company of the apostles, and the noble army of martyrs," whose blood, so freely shed for the faith, became the seed of that one true Catholic and Apostolic Church of which Christ alone is the Head; for we must ever remember, that though blindness in part hath happened unto Israel, that though the Jews, as a *nation*, have been scattered in all the world, yet it is to them, and to them *alone*, that we owe our faith, built as it is upon *their* prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone. So that it is as true now as it was when our Lord spoke the words, that "Salvation is of the Jews." It is true also that His blessing is still upon His ancient people; that He has never wholly rejected them, and that, remembering His covenant with Abraham, a branch of the old olive-tree has been spared to "take root downwards and to flourish upwards;" that a cluster of the old vine has been preserved, and that "a blessing is in it."

Spiritual idolatry is indeed of all sins the most offensive in the sight of God; but because we have been so strictly commanded to confine our *worship* to God alone, that is no reason why we should withhold *honour* from those to whom honour is due. Why should we look with cold indifference upon those

bright examples which God has given for our imitation? Because the stars are not the sun, must we refuse to gaze upon them, and to rejoice in their light, or to try and catch the sound of their voices, as they proclaim the divine Hand that made them? Some have imagined that it was dangerous to dwell upon the virtues and graces of the saints of God; some have considered irreverence towards their memory a safeguard against a superstitious veneration of the creature; and thus for a time it was thought wiser to set aside the beautiful commemorative services of our Church in honour of that cloud of witnesses to the facts of the Gospel, and to the Deity of our only Saviour, and she whom *all* generations were to call Blessed was named without reverence, as if there were danger in honouring her memory, or in meditating upon her example. Like children in the twilight, we were afraid where no fear was, and our anxiety was to fly an imaginary peril rather than, by facing it, effectually to overcome it. Thus we have given the adversary an advantage over us; for we have departed from the integrity of Scripture, we have dealt deceitfully with God's Holy Word; for we have been willing to keep back those parts that did not suit our particular views, instead of immediately suspecting the unsoundness of the views which could not bear the full light of Gospel truth.

It has often been said that the Romanist adds to Holy Writ, while the Protestant takes from it; it

might more truly be said that both sins are found in combination. How much, for instance, must be subtracted from God's Word before the last dogma of the Romish Church can be added to it; and how many doctrines of their own do various sects of protestants add to the Word of God, when they take from it all they dislike, even to the blotting out of some of those first principles of the Christian faith given to us by St. Paul^a? Let us accept the *whole* counsel of God, let us keep close to the teaching of the apostles, and then we need not fear to give honour to whom honour is due: for uncompromising as these holy men ever shewed themselves at the slightest approach to idolatry, sternly as St. Peter rejected the adoration of Cornelius, energetically and decisively as St. Paul and St. Barnabas repelled the worship offered to them at Lystra, still we ever find them receiving with joy, and acknowledging with gratitude, every demonstration of love and of homage paid to them for the sake of Him whose ambassadors they were. Gladly did they remember and testify to the many honours with which they were honoured by the barbarous people at Melita, and never did they refuse to receive for themselves, never did they withhold from others, those marks of respect which custom had rendered due to those who were above them in worldly po-

^a The principles and foundation of the Christian faith are stated by St. Paul, in Hebrews vi. 1, 2, to be—repentance from dead works—faith toward God—the doctrine of baptism—laying on of hands—the resurrection of the dead—and eternal judgment.

sition; it being God's own appointment that there should be in this world not only diversities of gifts but diversities of stations.

The apostles were no proud levellers of these human distinctions; they knew that it was before One alone that all men *could* be equal, and thus we find St. Paul readily acknowledging the nobility of Festus and the kingly dignity of Agrippa: when before the latter, how beautifully does he unite the burning zeal of the apostle with the courtesy of the Christian, when he exclaims, "I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, *except these bonds*;" and in his salutations to his fellow-labourers in Christ, what a remarkable lesson does he give us of thoughtful love, of brotherly kindness, of affectionate gratitude! How strikingly is this latter feeling developed when, desiring Tertius to salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, he adds, "and his mother and *mine*!" How touchingly do these few words express his filial gratitude for the maternal care which had been lavished upon him by this true Christian matron.

The critics of our enlightened age may think it a pity that, as St. Paul was writing for posterity, he should have taken up a whole chapter in such little acts of affectionate remembrances and friendly courtesies; but the cold calculations of the utilitarian, who would banish from his creed all that is "lovely and of good report,"—the asceticism of the Romanist,

who would break all the loving ties of kindred, and all the tender sympathies of life,—the rigidity of the Friend, who would refuse honour to whom honour is due,—the pride of the Socialist, who would bring every one down to his own level—can find no encouragement in the apostolic writings; neither do those find any encouragement who think it dangerous to honour the memory of the just. Let the Word of God be taken as a lantern to our steps, and we may walk boldly, for we walk securely. Let us then oppose light to darkness, and truth to error.

If the apostles condemned in their day those who preached “another Jesus they had not preached,” so may we in our day condemn those who preach another Mary of whom they had not preached. For the Blessed Virgin of Holy Writ is so little like the Virgin of the Romanist, that honouring the memory of the one will be our best security against worshipping the other; treading in the footsteps of the one will be our best safeguard against ever being led to bow down at the shrine of the other. By following the example of the Blessed Virgin of Holy Writ, we shall make the will of Christ our law; like her, our delight will be to lay up His words in our memory, and to ponder upon them in secret; and even when, like her, “we understand not the saying,” our heart will receive what our understanding cannot compass; like her, we shall be ready to send others to Christ, exhorting them to hear whatsoever *He* saith unto them, and to *do it*; like her, we shall begin our

course in praise and end it in prayer ; and like her, having fought the good fight of faith, we shall be received into the paradise of God. For there is she now rejoicing, not that the spirits on earth were made subject to her, but that her name was written in heaven : and abundantly blessed,—not because she bore the Saviour to the world, but because she heard God's Word and kept it ; and though foremost among the saints in light, radiant, it may be, as the star exceeding all others in glory, and nearest to the Sun of Righteousness, yet still is she “standing without” that light which none may approach unto, ready, in all humility, to cast her crown before the “throne of God and of the Lamb,” to magnify Him in the realms above whom she magnified on earth, and to join with angels and arch-angels, and all the company of heaven, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts ; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory : glory be to Thee, O Lord most High.”

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

“THE real father of Joseph was Jacob, (St. Matt. i. 16,) but having married the daughter of Heli, and being perhaps adopted by him, he was called his son, and as such was entered in the public registers; Mary not being mentioned, because the Hebrews never permitted the name of a woman to enter their genealogical tables, but inserted her husband as the son of him who was, in reality, but his father-in-law. Hence it appears that St. Matthew, who wrote principally for the Jews, traces the pedigree of Jesus Christ from Abraham, through whom the promise was given to the Jews, to David, and from David, through the line of Solomon, to Jacob the father of Joseph, the reputed or legal father of Christ; and that St. Luke, who wrote for the Gentiles, extends his genealogy upwards from Heli, the father of Mary, through the line of Nathan, to David, and from David to Abraham, and from Abraham to Adam, who was the immediate ‘Son of God’ by creation, and to whom the promise of the Saviour was given

in behalf of himself and all his posterity. The two branches of descent from David, by Solomon and Nathan, being thus united in the persons of Mary and Joseph, Jesus the son of Mary reunited in Himself all the blood, privileges, and rights of the whole family of David, in consequence of which He is emphatically called 'the Son of David.'"—*Note to 23rd verse of 3rd chapter of St. Luke, in Bagster's Comprehensive Bible.*

NOTE B.

THOUGH the Church of Judæa had before the captivity sinned by idolatry, and after their restoration by "making void the Word of God," "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," yet it never was guilty of the daring impiety of forbidding the Holy Scriptures to be read by the people, of treating God's Word as if it were not a "tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations," but rather a valuable but dangerous poison, safe only when administered by skilful hands. Never was the Jew restricted in the free use of his own Scriptures, "which are able to make *him* wise unto salvation;" for let the Jew once *really* believe in Moses, and he will be constrained to believe in Him of whom Moses wrote. Most wonderfully and providentially, the Mahometan also has been left perfectly

free by his own creed to study not only the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but also those of the New. One may even say that Mahomet, by placing the Koran, *not above*, but merely *on a level* with, the inspired Word of God, claiming for it nothing more than the same divine authority which gave the Law and the Gospel, has *enjoined* upon his followers the study of that entire Word of God of which he declared the Koran to be only a part; for Mahomet repeatedly disclaimed all pretension of giving a new religion to the world, or of placing the Koran *above the authority of the Law and the Gospel*. Repeatedly has he declared that the same Almighty voice which dictated the Law to Moses and the Gospel to Jesus, dictated the Koran to himself. These are the words he has put into the mouth of Almighty God:—

“We have surely sent down *the Law*, containing direction and light; thereby did *the Prophets*, who professed the true religion, judge those who judaized.

“We also caused Jesus, the Son of Mary, to follow the footsteps of the Prophets; *confirming the Law*, which was sent down before Him: and we gave Him *the Gospel*, containing direction and light; confirming, also, the Law, which was given before it.

“We have also sent down unto thee (Mahomet) *the book of the Koran*, with truth; confirming *that Scripture* which was revealed *before it*, and *preserving* the same from corruption^a.”

In reasoning with the Jew, the first promulgators

^a Sale's "Koran," vol. i. pp. 139, 140.

of the Gospel always appealed to their own Scriptures; in reasoning with the Athenians, St. Paul in like manner appealed to the true belief, of which traces still remained amongst that intellectual people, and which their own poets acknowledged—a belief in the One though unknown God, “in whom they lived, and moved, and had their being.” And it seems that as a door has now been most providentially opened to missionary efforts in the East, no wiser plan could be suggested than that adopted by Sir William Jones, who in reasoning with the Mahometan, ever appealed to his own Koran—seeking to convince the intelligent and conscientious Moslem that a belief in the inspiration of the Koran involved also a belief in the inspiration of the Law and the Gospel, and that by this belief he was bound to study that *whole* Word of God of which their prophet had declared the Koran to be only a part. This certainly does seem in the conversion of the Moslem to be the best *preparatory* step, the casting “the net,” as it were, “on the right side of the ship,” in humble trust that He who once stood visibly on the shore of the sea of Tiberias is still standing on the shore of this tumultuous ocean of life, ready to speak again the word of power, and to crown with success the efforts of His servants in the conversion of His people, and to realize the expectation which many earnest and thinking minds have entertained, that the way once opened, the conversion of the Mahometan world would proceed

“with uninterrupted course and with unexampled rapidity^b.”

NOTE C.

EXTRACTS from a sermon of Père Lavigne, preached in Paris, before the Pope's legate and twelve prelates, amongst whom were two archbishops and a cardinal :—

“I have the happiness of seeing, at this moment, the Church prostrating itself before Mary, as before its mother. All its power, all its consolations, all its graces come to it through Mary. Who has better understood this than the supreme Pontiff, whose presence is almost sensible in the midst of us? In the day of his distress, was it not towards Mary that his ardent prayers ascended? It was *she* who succoured him in his exile; it was *she* who replaced him triumphantly on his immortal rock.”

Again, in alluding to the recent calamitous inundations in France, the preacher exclaims :—

“Oh, Mary! save us; for the waters have invaded our heritages, the dwellings of our brethren and friends. What a hollow abyss is under our feet! without you there is no hope! They may give silver and gold, but all is insufficient without your aid, O Mary! It is to *you* we cry, wretched children of Eve. You *alone*, O Mary, can comfort us; you *alone* can repair all this ruin. Yes! by *your divine power you*

^b See Forster's “Mahometanism Revealed,” vol. ii. p. 373.

can make of our desolate fields a delicious paradise, and of those sad solitudes the blessed garden of the Lord."

The whole of this discourse might be profitably examined by those who doubt the extent to which the worship of the Virgin is now carried in the Church of Rome.

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